

Chapter 1 Changes

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Minerva McGonagall was decidedly unhappy with Albus.

"You can't leave him here, they are the worst sort of muggles, I've been watching them all day. They are bigoted, mean, and small minded. Please Albus, reconsider. James and Lily were vehement that Harry not go to them, don't ignore their wishes!"

"Nevertheless Minerva, here is where he must go. It is for the best you see. I have written a letter."

"What an amazing letter Albus! I must say that I will be monitoring this situation very closely indeed and will correct any deficiencies in Harry's care." There were few who could cow the Headmaster. Minerva was one. Albus set his jaw and mind. He would have his way this day no matter her objections.

The headmaster took the small basket in hand, slipped the letter into the basket among the blankets wrapping the tiny child and quickly walked to the door of number 4 Privet Drive. Hagrid stood crying while Minerva scowled and paced like a restless cat.

She was a woman of a certain age, comfortable in herself and a powerful witch. She was nearly the equal of Albus who was widely acknowledged as the greatest magician of the age. She loved and admired the Headmaster serving as his anchor to reality. He did tend to be a bit erratic on occasion. She would ensure this occasion did not end in tragedy.

She kept watch through the night and into the dawn. When Petunia Dursley, Harry's aunt, his mothers sister, came to the door to bring in the milk and eggs Minerva was watching.

Petunia was nothing if not a model of decorum. One just didn't scream into the quiet of the November dawn. She could perhaps be forgiven her angst in that she had suffered a tremendous shock. She had a brand new baby. She bustled young Harry inside and the door closed rather firmly on the prying eyes of the neighbors.

The next several days were pandemonium at the Dursley household. Harry had to be arranged for and that involved several decisions. The Dursleys decided that they should indeed keep the little freak. What would Mrs. Number 8 say if they gave their nephew away for adoption? There was no doubt that the neighbors knew of Harry's arrival. Harry would stay with Petunia and Vernon.

This was not happy news to the natural child of the Dursleys, the baby hippo Dudley. The Dursleys thought that no finer specimen of humanity had ever existed than their Dudders. Dudley was in training to becoming a burden to society, coddled and entitled, due every comfort and whim as if by divine writ. He was adapting well to his upbringing, perhaps showing a natural proclivity to be a berk. The boys were nearly the same age but the similarities ended there. Harry had a sweet nature, happy and energetic when he arrived. At first he constantly asked where his parents were as well as Moony and Padfoot. The Dursleys thought Moony and Padfoot might have been favored toys which was not far from the truth.

The only Potter quickly learned to not ask questions. If he was quiet there was less yelling and hitting. Harry was established in the cupboard under the stairs with a bare mat and a thin blanket. Spiders were his for company and cobwebs his decoration. He had no light, no proper clothes, not enough to eat, never a hug. He did have an abundance of slaps and of being shouted at.

No one will ever understand the mysteries of the human heart. How Petunia could have Dudley and Harry side by side and not love them both was a mystery.

Petunia and Vernon would gush over the children of their betters, being the horrid climbers that they were. Often Petunia would be ecstatic over the daughter of Mrs. Number 12 when they met in the little park or in the local shops of Little Whinging.

Petunia's showy affection and care for the little girl gave rise to a grand plan in Harry's little mind. He would be exactly like little Miss Number 12 and then his Aunt would love him. Simple really.

At the end of another day of spite, short rations, and his aunts sharp tongue Harry was deposited on his little mat in the cupboard under the stairs for the night. He was locked in and left until morning just as always. Just as always he knew that should he become

frightened or need care he must say nothing and do nothing. It was better to wait for morning than to be screamed at and shaken so. He learned to bear his fear and pain in silence.

But tonight would be different. Tonight he would change into a girl like the little girl in the park and his Aunt and Uncle would care for him and hug him and stop Dudley from hurting him. Harry concentrated very hard on being like the girl and wished with all his might.

In the dark Harry changed. His hair became long and lustrous, wavy, and blond like that little girl Aunt Petunia made such a fuss over. His body shape shifted, became longer, and his face was rounder - heart shaped. She fell into an exhausted sleep.

The amount of Dursley rage and fear upon opening Harry's cupboard in the morning was unbelievable. At first Aunt Petunia couldn't imagine how the daughter of Mrs. Number 12 came to be in the cupboard. When she insisted she was Harry, Aunt Petunia came absolutely unglued. Vernon was called home from work for a family emergency.

It was Vernon who broke four of the child's ribs and almost snapped her spine shaking her, demanding she change back and that such freakishness would never again be allowed again in the Dursley house. Harry was to change back IMMEDIATELY! Harry's face regained it's usual form, and her hair changed to raven black, but her body didn't change at all.

She couldn't move, her body wasn't working right, the pain from breathing was terrible. Little Harry passed out as Petunia pried the limp child away from Vernon. Petunia sent Vernon back to work to establish an alibi while she got rid of the baby.

Harry was only just 15 months old when he came to the doorstep of number 4 Privet Drive. She was only 19 months when she left for the local hospital.

Petunia knew Vernon had seriously injured the child and hurriedly took the baby to the local emergency room claiming to have found it on the sidewalk. The emergency room personnel saw enough of this type of injury that the child care services were called.

Minerva had been as good as her word. She monitored the situation very carefully, as carefully as anyone could. In fact, she spent more time by far checking on Harry than Albus would have liked had he known. The Headmaster, being a very important man, had other things to do and was very busy doing them.

Minerva was on the scene almost immediately. She looked the part of child services, being prim and proper in an almost Victorian way. Her credentials were impeccable. Minerva had Harry in the Hogwarts infirmary in moments and Madam Pomfrey was quick and thorough in her examination. The ladies discussed several strange findings concerning young Harry as Poppy worked over her.

Poppy told Minerva that Harry had four broken ribs and severely damaged spinal chord. Harry had a shockingly large magical core which had been bound. The child was malnourished and in psychological crisis after being thoroughly traumatized over a matter of months. Harry had transfigured herself from male to female at a level of detail that reached the chromosomal level. Harry had altered her DNA the previous night in her cupboard. Most amazingly, Harry also possessed more than one soul. More correctly Harry possessed the regulation one soul and a fragment of another.

Those were the facts, just the cold facts. The reality was that Harry was a startling beautiful child. Her unruly mass of raven hair, pale skin and large emerald eyes with long lustrous black lashes made her breathtakingly beautiful. James had been a handsome man and Lily had been the most beautiful witch of her generation.

Minerva and Poppy had a baby to arrange for. It was evident that Albus was of less than no use in the matter. Being women of good taste and of distinction they did as they should. They performed an end run on the Headmaster. The fact that neither had ever had a child and both mourned that emptiness daily they silently agreed to ignore. Maternal hormones were thick in the infirmary, but neither would speak of them. The ladies marshaled logic in defense of their hearts urging.

Albus had failed to provide for the child. They didn't trust anyone else to attempt the child's care. There were no Potters other than Harry. Sirius Black, the child's godfather, had betrayed Harry and her parents to their enemy and killed another of their friends,

Pettigrew. Lupin was a fine man twenty-seven days out of twenty-eight. One night a month he was an unreasoning beast who would kill Harry in an instant.

Alice Longbottom, Harry's godmother, was unavailable in a most horrific way. She and her husband Frank had run afoul of the LeStranges along with Barty Crouch Jr. and had been cursed to madness.

Minerva and Poppy knew that Harry was no ordinary baby. Merlin help them if Harry decided she wanted to be a spider or a dragon. For magic to change someone at the level of DNA was something unprecedented. What if she decided she wanted to be a star? Or a cloud? And so they left her magic bound.

That day Poppy Pomfrey gained a niece. She always called her niece Harry, short for Harriet. Poppy sold her little cottage in Wales, Minerva put her London townhouse to let and the ladies bought a small Victorian townhouse in San Francisco, in the Haight - Ashbury area. Minerva and Poppy purchased a house elf, Limpy, to care for Harry while they were away for the day. One of the ladies would always try to portkey for tucking in, story time, and kisses goodnight in the evening. It was difficult for them all to be apart for so much of the day and they all missed each other terribly but it was all they could think to manage. Harry was as safe as distance and the best wards could make her. She was showered with love along with kind firm discipline.

Eventually Harry would return to magical Britannia, when she reached 11 and started her magical education at Hogwarts.

The Headmaster was very disturbed to check into the situation at the Dursley residence and find out his Harry was gone, had been gone for a bit more than a year. The kerfuffle that followed was epic. Many ran to and many ran fro. Messages were sent at the highest levels in Ultra code. Frowns appeared on important faces.

Minerva watched the upset with amusement and no little sense of satisfaction. Madam Pomfrey was slightly less amused and more prone to bitterness. Their beautiful child had been so hurt when they got her. The ladies let the powers that be run on as they would. No one asked Minerva or Poppy, so they didn't say. Minerva did make sure to keep an ear out for any sign that the Dark Lord's followers

were closing in on Harry. Albus was relieved to know the Death Eaters were as clueless as he was.

Perhaps the crowning achievement of Minerva's magical career was keeping the secret of the whereabouts of Harry Potter. She worked directly with Albus and was able to conceal her involvement in Harry's disappearance.

Petunia had been exhaustively questioned by the Headmaster and had told several contradictory stories. Albus was able to determine that Harry had been there for four months, and that he had been severely mistreated. The Headmaster seemed to think that someone had switched babies during Harry's last night at Privet Drive. It never occurred to him that Harry had switched gender. Under the assumption that Harry had been spirited away before that fateful morning the Headmaster concentrated his efforts on those who might have been able to pull such a switch. He stymied himself with his assumptions, as the wards on number 4 Privet Drive were indeed formidable, and none had passed them that evening. He studied Petunia's mind. She really did believe that she opened the cupboard under the stairs to a child that at first looked like a girl in the neighborhood and then morphed to look remarkably like Harry. Petunia dismissed Vernon's injuring the child as completely understandable given the unnatural freakishness displayed. The brat had gotten no more than he deserved. She had dropped the child at the local hospital and felt well shut of the whole affair. She had not been subjected to a Confundus or a Memory Charm, it really was most puzzling.

The Headmaster took the time to involve the Ministry. That the Dursleys walk away from injuring a child so terribly with no consequences was not to be borne. The Ministry altered some muggle paperwork and the Dursleys were arrested and convicted of child abuse and endangerment. They were remanded to a psychiatric hospital for evaluation of their sanity as they refused to budge concerning the unnaturalness of the missing child. It would be some years before they saw free daylight.

Harry Potter was known to be alive somewhere, the name was still on the rolls for Hogwarts. Minerva and Poppy put their heads together and tried to solve the problem of an identity for Harry. Their solution was elegant and simple. She would attend Hogwarts as Harriet Pomfrey, the magical daughter of a distant relative of both

the Potters and the Pomfreys, the first magical in a long line of colonial squibs. Poppy Pomfrey had been asked to raise her as her closest magical relative. Minerva had joined in as Poppy's friend and confidant. It was much easier to slip a name into the register than to reassign Harry Potters identity. Poppy registered her distant niece from the United States for enrollment beginning September 1991.

The ladies took a long muggle flight to New Guinea and had a tribal adoption preformed by a tribe of mixed magical and muggles. The tribe's only requirements for adoption were the physical presence of the people concerned and their willingness. The adoption was legally binding in the magical and muggle worlds.

Limpy would cover herself with a glamor so that she looked human and push Harry around the neighborhood in a pram, to the park or to the store for food. Harry's scar was disguised with a simple glamor. Harry attracted a lot of attention as pretty children do. She never quite thought of the attention as her due. Love had been snatched away before, it could happen again. Slowly she quit asking for her parents, Moony, and Padfoot. She never asked for Wormy. Limpy made sure Harry was as safe as she could make an active child. Harry took her lumps from the trees she climbed and the swings and the occasional scrape with another child. Harry would seldom cause trouble, but there wasn't a bit of back down in her. She was very protective of anyone or anything being set on. Whatever the odds, whatever the fight, Harry piled in on the losing side and gave it her all. She seemed genetically programed for valor.

Poppy and Minerva were often unnerved by the topics that Harry brought up but told their truth and told it with love. No more could be asked of anyone. The Aunties questioned Limpy closely about how she was teaching Harry. Limpy stood firm. Harry would be shown the world as it was, not as Disney would have most children hope it might be if they just wished really, really, hard. Harry would have a firm grasp of reality and a firm loving family to temper that harshness. To coddle Harry was to court disaster for their world. Harry was fated to fight a being of endless malice. Disney would not prepare her for that fight.

Always Harry was apart. She had friends but none were close enough to really know her with the exception of her aunties and especially Limpy. Limpy was her constant, her companion, and her teacher of all the very most important lessons. It was Limpy that

came to her in the night when the nightmares would wake her. Two dreams haunted her. One was the screaming, the green light and the chilling laughter, the red eyes. When she saw those eyes she would wake screaming. Limpy would hold her, pet her raven hair, and sing to her. She sang soft songs in a strange tongue. The other dream was of a dark space, cold, bare. She was full of the most terrible feeling of loss. A light would come there was screaming and pain finally a strange numbness. But if she waited, she saw her aunties. She woke crying from that dream. Often Limpy wouldn't hear her and she carried her pain in the darkness. Slowly as the years passed the dreams faded. She trusted Limpy and her Aunties as anchors in her life.

Harry attended Lycee Francais La Perouse, a very expensive private school in her neighborhood. Many of the children were from families that were powerful and wealthy. The sons and daughters of diplomats and the scions of finance and of illegal drugs attended. A few were magical and to them Harry was the niece of Ms. Pomfrey, a healer. To the mundane Harry was the niece of Dr. Pomfrey. The Lycee was happy to accept tuition in the form of 24 karat gold bullion.

Limpy couldn't always protect Harry. Evidently there is no power in the universe, not even a devoted house elf, that will save a child the lessons of the playground. By virtue of her solitary nature Harry was prime pickings for those who were mean and large. One such was Robert Rosen. He was a garden variety bully. His specialty was physical intimidation combined with mocking of any bit of difference he could detect. It was the standard bully curriculum, as outlined the handbook given to jerks at birth. He would corner Harry, when he could, and run his routine. Almost always she could elude him, a fact that moved her up his most wanted list. He measured success by tears. His success rate with Harry was dismal, reason enough to make her an especially juicy target. She needed to learn her lesson, and her place. It wasn't long before Rosen learned the easiest way to get Harry close was to get someone else, anyone else really, so long as they were decent and run his routine on them. Harry would usually show up and interfere.

Robert had Danny in a headlock thumping the top of his skull while demanding unconditional surrender in the form of some serious kowtowing. Danny was struggling to break the hold and starting to cry from rage and frustration more than from pain or fear. Robert was having a tremendously good time. Harry turned the corner with

a pretty good idea of what to expect. The soundtrack was familiar. She slipped her bookbag off her shoulder and choked up on the strap so it was slightly clear of the floor.

"Let him go Robert."

Robert ignored she as if she wasn't there. Danny was crying fairly hard now, he was embarrassed to have Harry fight his fight and the emotional froth was too much for him.

Harry kicked the back of Roberts right knee, causing him to collapse with all his considerable weight. Robert bellowed, let go of Danny and stood to go after Harry. He was standing and turning while Harry swung her bookbag as hard as she could right for where she hoped his face would be. Her timing was exquisite. Roberts parents would be quite upset about the plastic surgeons bill for rebuilding Roberts splattered nose. Harry missed killing him by a hair. Had the angle been a bit different she would have driven the cartilage from his nose into his brain. As it was his head snapped back and he crumpled into a still heap. There was a large silence. Danny snuffled a bit.

"Wow Harry, you messed him up. Your going to be in so much trouble."

"Your welcome Danny."

"Oh, yeah, thanks Harry."

She nodded, took a step forward and poked at Robert with her foot. Nothing.

"I guess I will go get a teacher."

Harry turned and started down the hall. Behind her the crowd melted away, leaving Danny and the comatose Robert.

The Aunts had to attend a rather grim conference with the principal over the flattening of the sacred Rosen nose. They were not pleased to have to do so. They took part in some really rather relentless questioning of Harry and Limpy. Once they had a better idea of the situation they enrolled Harry in a martial arts program. Harry found her first passions. She loved tai chi and swordsmanship. Her

teacher was talented at both and happy to have such a dedicated pupil.

Harry asked Limpy about the poor people who littered the Haight smashed under their addictions shortly after the Robert incident. They had been a constant fact of life for her. She wasn't sure how to respond to their constant pleas for help. She was little and didn't have any of the things they seemed to need. Still it felt wrong to just ignore those people, surely someone should help them?

Limpy helped Harry learn the hard lessons of compassion and its limits, of freedom of choice and the two edged sword that it is. Limpy took Harry out in the late night and they walked in Golden Gate Park. Harry saw the needle and the damage done. Limpy showed Harry the cops shaking down the druggies and the druggies fighting for a fix and the rich walking by it all as if it wasn't there. Limpy also showed Harry the people who helped. The street priest feeding addicts Limpy and Harry would help. They would talk to that priest, and to the aid workers, and the cops who threw everyone in jail so they would be warm on a cold night no matter the paperwork. The people they talked with never seemed to remember Harry and Limpy but would feel nourished and stronger after zoning out for a bit, almost like magic.

Harry met Toledo Tommy on one of those walks. He was maybe fourteen, a skinny street rat. He was kind to her, gentle and funny. He would tell long impossible tales of his travels. He loved his skateboard and his cocaine. She struggled to help him, feeding him, trying to keep him safe and warm. He died one evening of septicemia while she held his hand. Harry was nine. Limpy would rock Harry to sleep night after night following Tommy's death. Limpy had no answers, only comfort. There really weren't any answers.

Most evenings after Tommy died Limpy and Harry would pop to the park and leave a bit of food for those who hadn't managed to feed themselves that day. Sometimes they called for the police, or on the cold days and the bad days, the coroner.

Harry had street credentials. Muggles couldn't see Limpy, except for a few who were so tripped out on mushrooms they would sense magic. Harry was a street legend. Her soft hand could still a bad trip or could ease the shakes, a smushed peanutbutter sandwich. And don't ever, but ever, try to hurt her. Bad things happened fast to

people who messed with the little green eyed angel. Harry's beauty had attracted a lot of the wrong kind of attention. Limpy was extremely abrupt with the bare ass under the trench coat crowd. Word got around.

During the holidays the ladies explored the Bay area and the mountains, the Sierra's and the Rockies. Harry learned to ski at Squaw and Heavenly Valley with her school. Skiing quickly became another passion. She would often travel with her school to the resorts for the weekend. She preferred traditional skis to snowboarding. Skis seemed elegant if a bit more difficult to manage. She adored steep and deep and hated the pointless jarring of moguls. Above all she adored speed, cracking the edges and being launched into the air by her speed to flip the skis to the other side and slam the edges again on a slope that came as close as possible to vertical and still hold snow.

Harry grew up being loved and happy. She grew up training for combat like a figure skater trains for the Olympics. She was built of stainless steel cable on a titanium frame. She knew that a heart of darkness didn't require a dark mark on the arm. She had made and failed the choice between what is right and what is easy and had chosen again as we all do every day. She learned to play well with others as well as to read quietly. She was an excellent student. Her Aunts and Limpy were all in agreement that academics were first. Both Harry and Limpy knew French, Limpy had an excellent education, as she had stayed close to the Lycee to protect Harry should she need it. Limpy lost the simple patois that so many house elves spoke. She used clear and complete sentences in both French and English. She and Harry did their assignments together, arguing companionably over answers.

Harry worked hard at mind magic to shield her mind from other magicals, the meditative aspects helped her in her martial arts as well. She hated her glasses and insisted on contacts from the moment she knew of them. Her aunts were amused to learn that it had NOTHING to do with looks and EVERYTHING to do with peripheral vision.

She worked a bit as a babysitter or doing chores for neighbors to supplement her allowance so that she could have a special thing or pay for a present for Limpy on her own. She was a young lady of honor and distinction. She was pursued because of her beauty, but

never really believed in it, the Dursleys had not let her go unscathed. She vastly distrusted unthinking admiration, correctly assuming it had nothing to do with her.

And the summer of her eleventh year came around and it was time for the Talk.

Minerva and Poppy enlisted Limpy's considerable help to smooth the discussion. Harry knew she would be attending Hogwarts in Scotland come September and that her aunties worked there. She knew better than to expect preferential treatment by her aunties. She knew that her parents had been murdered by a madman. She understood that some of his followers might wish her harm and that was why she trained so hard in self defense, escape, and mind magic. She had to protect her secrets. Now she needed to know how it all fit together.

"Harry dear, please sit down, Aunt Poppy and I have a lot to talk to you about this evening, some of it very difficult."

Harry cut her eyes to Limpy. Limpy's ears were lowered but not flattened. Things were serious but not immediately critical. Harry nodded and sat.

"In a few weeks you will be leaving for Hogwarts. Your formal magical education will begin. The central reason you are attending Hogwarts is that it is the safest place in the world for you to learn magic. Your safety from Voldemort requires you to be near Albus Dumbledore as you learn."

"As you know Voldemort is the madman who killed your parents. We have told you he killed them because they were attempting to protect their child. Voldemort judged Harry Potter to be the subject of a prophecy that stated Harry could defeat him. Voldemort does not know the complete prophecy but acted on what he did know. Harry Potter survived his killing curse, something no one has ever done. The killing curse rebound and destroyed the body of Voldemort leaving Harry with a scar on his forehead."

Harry put a hand to her forehead tracing her scar, something definitely didn't add up here.

"The Headmaster thinks that Voldemort has not passed from this world and will, in time, return to a physical form. It is a good assumption that Harry Potter would be in great danger should he return to the magical world. So far as the world knows Harry James Potter disappeared while living with his only relatives, the Dursleys, and hasn't been seen since."

"Many people will suspect you of being Harry Potter with your looks and scar. You do look remarkably like your father except for your eyes."

"We must stick to our story; that you are the child born to a distant mundane relative of the Potters, also related to the Pomfreys. Your parents were unable to deal with such a powerfully magical child and gave you up to be adopted and raised by Poppy and I. Harriet Pomfrey, the daughter of a distant squib relative of the Potters, will attend Hogwarts. Should that ruse be penetrated you are the twin sister of Harry Potter, kept secret from everyone since the moment of your birth and adopted and raised by Poppy and I."

"We must keep these secrets as long as we can. We hope to keep them until Voldemort is finally defeated. This is a defeat that you might have a part in my dear. We were at a loss to explain your scar, however our beautiful city has given us the perfect answer. You had the scar done to yourself to commemorate your lost brother, whom you presume the forces of Voldemort to have taken. The forces of dark have indeed taken Harry Potter just as the forces of light have given us a beautiful niece. Do you have any questions Harry?"

Limpy's ears were back and down, eyes half shut. She waited for the explosion.

"But I've always had my scar. What are you saying?"

Harry had always thought of her Auntie's cover story as her reality. She was Harriet, the hidden twin of Harry Potter. Even as she asked she felt the truth of it. Her nightmares, the sense of difference, they made sense now. She finally understood the underlying unease she always felt. She felt numb, everything echoed and seemed odd, out of step, like a movie with the soundtrack running behind the action.

Poppy answered in her soft voice.

"You were born Harry James Potter, the son of Lily and James Potter. We are telling you now as it is likely that your identity will be revealed, at least to you, during your sorting. A powerful magical artifact, the Sorting Hat, is used to place students in their Houses. The hat will know your true heritage, that you were born Harry James Potter. We did not tell you before in order to protect you. We lied to you to keep you safe. We have always told you that you were Harry's twin. Should you have encountered someone with mind powers, they might have noticed your resemblance to your father and probed your mind. Do you ever recall a tickling sensation in your mind? Have you ever thought something outside yourself was making you recall your earliest memories?"

"A few times, yes. I made it stop. Limpy helped."

Harry sounded dazed. Limpy slid an arm around her and hummed softly, a song she had sung Harry to sleep with for years. Harry eased a bit, less tense.

Limpy had hoped to stay out of this discussion, but it looked like she would have her innings.

"There was a man who was visiting one of Harry's skiing friends. He was English and seemed very interested in Harry. I put a protection spell on Harry. There were some other times we had to do the same thing. He was the only one who felt truly evil. Harry is very beautiful, some bad people have tried to get near her. They won't act that way again."

Harry and Limpy shared a look and a snicker. The Aunties decided the less they knew the better. Harry took a deep breath and dove in.

"You are telling me I am Harry Potter and a boy?"

"No dear, we are telling you that you were born Harry Potter, a boy. You changed yourself to a girl when you were about 19 months old. Harry, that was extraordinary magic, something no one else has ever managed. We think very soon after you became a girl Vernon Dursley, your uncle, hurt you very badly. Aunt Minerva took you from your relatives at the hospital and I healed your injuries. We decided that we would see to your future as the Headmaster had failed rather spectacularly. We grew to love you very much, you have been

the central joy of our lives since you came to us. Please forgive us the deception we used in order to keep you safe. We believed it necessary."

Harry doubted everything at the moment. Everything except his Aunt's love, and the love of Limpy. She nodded, stiff and wide eyed.

"What of the prophecy? What does it say?"

"Only the headmaster knows the full prophecy my dear. He has told no one that I know of."

"Will he tell me?"

"I very much doubt it Harry. He doesn't like to tell people things, he likes to be told things."

Harry was thinking of some things to tell him.

"Do you think I should know?"

Her aunts were silent for a moment.

"Perhaps not dear. You are training as hard as you can to survive. You are less able to defend yourself than you will be as you train more. Your not having the information may keep you safe. Should Voldemort capture you he may hesitate to kill you for fear that killing you would bring about his own end. He is trapped not knowing the full prophecy and, we imagine, quite reluctant to try to kill you again as he so nearly died himself on his last attempt. Once you can keep the information safe from him I think you should know. He is very skilled at mind magics and can use his power against all but the very best to learn what he wants from them."

"He is just a spirit now?"

"So the Headmaster believes."

"Is the Headmaster trying to finish him right now? Is anyone?"

Limpy's ears were full up and forward, Harry was asking the right questions now.

Poppy and Minerva sat flummoxed.

"Why no dear, I don't believe anyone is. I will see to it. The obvious always seems so obvious once it's pointed out doesn't it Poppy?"

"There are two more things Harry dear. When you were a newborn your magic was bound. This is often done to magically powerful children to help control bouts of accidental magic. I think this was an especially good choice for you, as your magic is very strong even bound. Tonight we will unbind your magic. Tonight is the summer solstice and an especially powerful night for this type of ritual."

"The last thing you should know is that in his attempt to kill you Voldemort somehow linked the two of you. You have a bit of his soul embedded in you. Poppy was aware of it from the first time she examined you. We have looked for years for a method to remove the vestige of Voldemort. We have yet to find a way to rid your body of his bit of soul that doesn't kill you."

Harry sat quivering. She didn't know quite what she was feeling, so many different emotions washed over her.

"Your sure that is all of it. This is all the news right?"

Limpy was taking a quick scan for breakables. Harry didn't go off often but it could be spectacular when she did. Her aunts nodded.

"So a maniac killed my parents, tried to kill me, didn't kill me but infected me with a bit of his putrid soul, killed himself except he didn't die all the way, and my magic is tied up to protect me."

Her Aunts nodded cautiously. Harry took a breath and continued.

"The Headmaster, who knows the most about all of this, the only one Voldemort fears, has done nothing for over 10 years and won't tell anyone anything so they can try to do something. The Headmaster gave me to people who hated me to keep me safe. Those people hurt me badly enough that you rescued me. The Headmaster never knew that. And you two want me to go to his school. So he can keep me safe. As safe as at the Dursleys I assume. Is that right?"

Limpy spoke into the silence.

"Mistresses should listen to Miss Harry. Something sounds stupid to Limpy."

The four of them sat at the kitchen table and began to discuss options. They would have to move the Headmaster from the center of his web, and get him into motion. His sitting and waiting was worse than pointless.

At midnight on midsummer's eve Harry's magic was unbound in a ritual that took place atop Mt. Tamalpias. She was asleep for 13 hours after the ceremony.

Once she was awake and having eaten a gargantuan pile of calories for breakfast the Aunties and Harry went shopping. There was a store that rented theater props on Market Street that had a special door. That door could only be seen by magical people. Through that door was the largest magical shopping area between Seattle and Los Angeles. Harry got robes and potions ingredients, she got a cauldron and a telescope. She got a ton (by weight - after all her guardians were a teacher and a healer) of books. She got a witches hat that she swore would never, ever, be on her head so long as her head was attached to her body.

She got a pet. Limpy picked her out, a snowy owl. Poor Hedwig was reluctant to assume the position until she learned that transatlantic flights would not be necessary. She was a magnificent bird, very beautiful and knew it. Hedwig and Harry together admiring one another was quite a sight. Harry had clothes she liked, jeans and tshirts, sweaters and jackets. She bulked up on her winter clothes, winter in Scotland was a long season. For the first time Harry worried about dress clothes. Skirts and pretty blouses and maybe jewelry and other girly accouterments. Her aunts let her pick her way. Harry had always been comfortable living in the middle, a very tomboyish tomboy. She seemed to be ready to branch out a bit now.

Finally they went shopping for a wand. This was the height of the trip so far as Harry was concerned. She actually had galleons enough to get a spare and every intention of getting one. It was basic self defense.

The four of them trooped tiredly into Ollivander's Wandporioum, LLC and got to looking. The young Mr. Ollivander measured and poked

Harry. Harry swished dozens of wands before one liked her. A holly and phoenix feather wand chose her with a fountain of red and gold sparks. Mr. Ollivander was more than a little relieved as a good portion of his stock had been sorted through. The good man was quite startled when Harry asked for another just like it.

"Miss Pomfrey the wand chooses the witch. Your wand has chosen you. Are you not satisfied with the wand?"

"So far sir it seems wonderful. I think we will be great friends. I would like an additional friend as well. Please may I have another?"

It wasn't a request ever made so far as young Mr. Ollivander knew, but he was in the business of selling wands. They swished for several more minutes when there was another success. This wand announced it had chosen Harry with a brilliant beam of light, scarlet screaming red light that shot out of it scorching the ceiling.

Harry grinned like mad. "I would like this one as well sir!"

The group left the store with Harry's two wands, two holsters complete with anti summoning charm and invisibility charm and a mental release that shot the wand into Harry's hand at her thought. Harry asked how the holsters were programmed but Mr. Ollivander was not muggle wise so the question was gibberish to him.

Once they were home Auntie Minerva took the tracking charms off Harry's wands and began her lessons. She learned the paint ball charm and started target practice as well as getting used to her holsters. It was an undeniably butch evening.

Harry was holding the fire beam wand and imagining a light saber. She had loved the Star Wars movies the instant she had seen them. Part of her still wanted to fly an X wing against the Empire. She moved through her Tai Chi moves imagining the snap hiss of a saber lighting off. She moved to her sword blocks and slashes. She concentrated on the feel of the saber, how the light blade would fight movement and the inertia of the gyroscopic force of the blade. She imagined the switch under her thumb and flicked it on.

She promptly dropped the only real light saber on Earth. She managed to twitch her foot away from the blade as it cut into the concrete of the basement floor. She sat heavily. Very carefully she

reached out and flipped the switch. The blade snapped and hissed out of existence. She turned it on again and the blade hissed into existence. She began her moves again, very slowly. It wouldn't do to cut through the plumbing or the floor joists.

As she moved with total concentration a part of her wondered if magic could take humanity to the stars. Was magic the force? But that would make some wine guy in Napa Valley the greatest Seer of history. Still, where did the things that are vanished go? How did apparition really work?

Harry was pretty sure if Minerva saw the light saber she would take it away. But maybe not. Harry had been in martial arts training for years now. Harry made her way upstairs for an intense conversation. After all a sword by any other name still cuts things.

On August 31st at 10:53 am Harriet Pomfrey stood in the middle of Kings Cross station totally pissed off. She had two aunties who working at the school whose train she was to board. She had known she was going to be on this train leaving from this platform for months. It never occurred to either of them to explain to Harry how to get onto platform 9 3/4's. The obvious is always obvious in hindsight. This perfectly true truism did NOT comfort our Harry.

She would not cry, or scream, or freak out and cut her way to the train with her too cool light saber. She would behave. Even if someone would pay.

A slender black boy with dreads passed her with a caged owl on his luggage trolley.

"Hogwarts bound miss?"

Harry almost fainted with relief.

"Yes and I forgot to ask how to get on the stupid platform! Can you help me?"

"That I can little miss, just follow me. We go at that brick wall there and just keep going. You must believe you can go through it or it won't work so watch me do it and you can be sure."

Harry was sure her saber would open it if it got shitty with her but smiled her thanks and nodded. The young man gave a push and a grin and sailed through the brickwork. Harry pasted a smile on her face and pushed after him.

After going several steps further than would have been the case had the brick stopped her she opened her eyes and saw the Hogwarts Express for the first time. Harry started to understand why her aunts wanted her to go to Hogwarts. Gleaming scarlet steam engines were not to be missed. The hubbub of a magical crowd saying goodbye in a mix of tears and laughter was heady stuff. Harry pushed her trolley to the luggage car and helped the elves hoist in her trunk, keeping a rucksack with her school robes and Hedwig in her cage. She stood and gawked at the people around her. Having grown up in San Francisco she was no stranger to strangeness but this, this was amazing. There was a woman with a vulture on her hat. A stuffed vulture. Harry felt much better about her fashion choices now. She

wore a peasant blouse with long flowing sleeves to hide her wands, bootcut jeans, and a pair of Fryes. Top it all off with a battered baseball cap (no logo, never a logo) with a ponytail out the back. She was every bit the fashionable preteen from the west coast. Which was a long way from platform 9 3/4.

The crowd was thinning fast, it was almost time to pull out. Harry swung up onto a car and began to look for a compartment that didn't hold a bunch of people a lot bigger than her. She looked into a compartment with a round boy clutching a frog and looking a bit lost.

"Can I join you?"

"Of course!"

His smile was delighted, he seemed surprised anyone would want to sit with him. Harry knew just how painful feeling like a dweeb was. She stuck out her hand.

"Harriet Pomfrey, please call me Harry, I hate Harriet."

He grinned and introduced himself.

"Neville Longbottom, pleased to meet you. First year then?"

Harry nodded settling into the seat opposite.

"And you?"

He fluffed himself a bit thinking anyone would mistake him for a lofty second year.

"Yes thats me, first year."

"Whats your pets name then Neville? This mad woman is Hedwig."

He laughed, a nice happy noise.

"This elusive terror is Trevor the Disappearing Toad."

They chatted along comfortably and decided they would quite like to visit the places they each lived. After all everyone wanted to visit San Francisco, and Neville lived on a huge English estate and who

didn't want to visit one of those? Soon they were deep in a wondering if they had ever been told about one another before. Neville knew Aunt Minerva, who was a classmate of his grans, and knew of Aunt Poppy.

They saw a girl wandering the aisle looking a bit forlorn and asked her in to sit. She was cute with buck teeth and a mass of bushy brown hair. Her hair seemed to have it's own life, you could almost see eyes in there winking out and cheeky. She was very nervous and very bright, she made both of those things very obvious. Her name was Hermione Granger.

The three of them chattered along happily as the countryside rolled by becoming wilder as the train moved north towards Scotland. They pooled their knowledge of the sorting which was rumor and silence along with their knowledge of the coming course work. Hermione was wildly over prepared having read the total of the course work for the year. Neville could hold his own with her in herbology, his hobby, and Harry was sure who would win a fight, but that really didn't qualify as course work. The lunch trolley stopped for them and they had a great time selecting a huge variety of bad things which Hermione enjoyed particularly as her parents were both dentists. Trevor made a break for freedom while the kids were biting the heads off of chocolate frogs. Trevor may have suspected he was next and taken his chance.

There was nothing for it but to go on a frog hunt. The trio started up the train asking if anyone had seen an escaped toad, traumatized by chocolate frog consumption as Harry put it. They got a few laughs but no Trevor so on they slogged. One boy was very haughty and snippy for no apparent reason. Neville had heard of his family and wouldn't say a lot but the impression was clear the Malfoys weren't nice people.

They finally did find Trevor asleep next to a rat and a red headed boy. Actually, just the rat was asleep. The boy was staring out the window and looking a bit lost. Once the toad rescue was complete and introductions made the trio invited Ron to join them if he cared to. He ambled back to their compartment with them which was fortunate as he had a battered deck of exploding snap cards. They had a grand time and got singed a bit in the process. They shared around the food that they had and generally poked to see how they would fit together.

It felt good to Harry. Neville was really nice, Hermione was brilliant and nice, and Ron was funny and nice. She could spend time with these kids. Hermione even skied a bit!

As the day darkened they all changed into their school robes and tried to find Trevor again. He didn't like to see them eating the frogs and, well, Ron loved the frogs. They would have to work something out.

The students poured off the train, Neville holding Trevor by one of his massive rear legs as he croaked dismally. A gigantic man, easily eight feet tall and five wide was bellowing,

"Firs years, firs years to me, come on you lot, we have a boat ride ahead, firs years over here."

"Four to a boat now, mind yourselves, the water is cold and deep hereabouts."

Everyone piled into a boat. Hagrid, as he introduced himself, gave a tap on his boat with his pink broom and off they all went like ducklings following their mother. The boats rounded a curve in the shoreline and there was Hogwarts. The castle was a thousand years old and beautiful. She, the castle was definitely a she, was proud and strong. She stood tall and turreted on her cliff over the lake. Her thousands of windows blazed with a warm light and she was glorious. Now Harry understood why her Aunts wanted her here. Here was something to be worthy of, something to stand for, something to save and support. Harry knew then that Hogwarts would always be in her life in some way.

They left the boats and Aunt Minerva led them to a side room with instructions to touch nothing and be quiet. Shortly they were brought into Hogwarts Great Hall.

Thousands of candles floated in midair and the ceiling was the sky. Some great work of magic had charmed the ceiling to look exactly like the sky outside.

In the place of honor, in the center of everything sat a manky old wizard's hat. The hat sang some doggerel about the virtues of each

house and accepted the applause of the assembly. Aunt Minerva started to read the names of the first years.

"Euan Abercrombie"

Euan came forward and put the hat on. In a minute the hat called out,

"HUFFLEPUFF."

Euan scooted off to the puff table to applause. Hermione was sorted to Gryffindor as was Neville, the Malfoy boy went to Slytherin and suddenly it was Harriet Pomfrey.

Harry stumbled to Aunt Minerva and sat on the stool. Her Aunt winked at her and gave her the hat. The hat dropped down to the bridge of her nose and it got very dark.

"Hmm. Very interesting. And very clever. I assume your aunts thought I would go along with this?"

"Yes sir, they hoped so. You have only sorted so we hoped you would just sort me and say nothing."

"You are an amazing creature Miss Pomfrey, I will be most interested to follow your career here. I wish you the very best and will do what I can to help you. If you are ever in need of help, call for me. I may only be a hat, but I will do what I can. Let us sort you now. You would do well in either Hufflepuff or Gryffindor. You have no personal ambition, seek nothing for yourself beyond your needs so Slytherin wouldn't be a good choice for you. You have the brains for Ravenclaw, but your passions are stronger as is true of one already sorted this evening."

"Gryffindor please, I have friends there."

"An excellent argument for Hufflepuff, but I do think it should be" and this aloud "GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry sighed and put the hat on the stool for the next student. She heard Aunt Minerva call,

"Harry Potter."

The room went still. McGonagall waited a moment and then called the next name. The Great Hall seemed to deflate a little. The Slytherins puffed their chests a bit. Harry was happy to be seated with Neville and Hermione watching the sorting instead of participating in any way. A bit of hand clapping felt like all she could manage at the moment. Ron was sorted into Gryffindor as was usual for his family. With Zabini going to Slytherin the sorting finished.

Ron seemed to enjoy the feast as much as any four people. He seemed to make a mess worse than any ten people. For a long term friendship to take root he would have to chew and swallow as separate actions. Harry wasn't a delicate eater but she vowed to put someone else between her and Ron the next meal. She needed to know the food on her plate had started there instead of migrating there in an attempt to escape Ron. Maybe Trevor was right.

The headmaster gave some warnings and some welcoming words. That all passed in a haze of overeating, exhaustion and emotional overload. Finally they were led away by the Gryffindor prefect Percy Weasley another of Ron's brothers.

Harry would never be able to remember much about the first trip to the Gryffindor tower. She stumbled up to bed on autopilot and collapsed onto her wonderfully comfortable four poster bed. Hedwig was waiting for a quick word and once assured that Harry had survived, launched out the window for a nights hunting.

Hermione forced Harry to brush her teeth before bed. Then it was a long nights sleep for the start of her magical education.

Harry had never been one to take a long time in the morning and that habit stood her well at Hogwarts. Lavender and Pavarti were both bathroom hogs. Hermione was compulsive about her teeth but quick about the rest. Harry was just fast. She waited in the common room for Hermione and was pleased to see Neville tumble down the stairs looking mostly asleep but happy to see her. Hermione skipped up to them and they set out on a voyage of discovery in search of the Great Hall and breakfast.

Hogwarts liked to change things about so the route to a place didn't stay the same always. The paintings were helpful waving them on

but were a bit over the top in extorting them to do their all to learn it all. By the time they made breakfast they had been told no less than fifteen times to study hard and be good. Harry felt like throwing firecrackers under the teachers table.

Breakfast was wonderful with all Harry's favorite cooked foods. There was an odd lack of cereal. She would miss her granola evidently. Aunt Minerva handed out the schedules and they were pleased to see that they were all scheduled alike. Owl post arrived with Neville in the clear lead for number of packages full of things he had forgotten. The girls cheered him up with a word about how much his gran must care for him to send him so much. Nev confessed he hadn't forgotten the stuff so much as he wanted to be shut of it but his gran was nothing if not relentless.

They trooped off to their first class after having witnessed the chaos of Ron at a hurried breakfast. Harry and Hermione spent a few minutes telling Ron that while he was a great guy he needed to chew and swallow in that order, and not talk during either process. He had difficulty with the concepts but did promise to give it a go if they were going to be so adamant about it.

Eventually they found the potions lab. They were settling in when the teacher swooped into the lab like batman. He was a tall man with pale skin, a snide and angry look. His face was chiseled and gaunt with an overlarge nose. His hair was jet black and lank, greasy looking. He did not seem pleased to be there. He did not seem to have ever ordered a happy meal. He may have never laughed. He was singularly unpleasant in look and manner. He was Professor Severus Snape.

What followed was torture. Snape explained nothing, assumed the days material was read and understood before the class meeting and gave no practical instruction. It was like walking into a kitchen for the first time and being told to make a cake with only a list of ingredients and a recipe. Harry had often watched and helped Aunt Poppy brew household remedies so she was moderately comfortable with the task, Hermione had of course read the whole book and was a natural talent. The girls were able to pull the boys through the lesson. Snape prowled the room awarding points to his Slytherins and deducting points from the Gryffindors for the most ridiculous of reasons. He actually took points from Hermione for knowing the answers, and from Harry for giving her a hug to comfort

her. Harry glared at him for a second before dropping her eyes. Her aunts had warned her not to look at anyone directly since they might have a talent in mind magics.

Snape scented prey. For the rest of the lesson he badgered Harry. The self control she had learned in martial arts stood her well as she worked along without comment while he circled looking for the taint of blood in the water.

It was a vast relief when class ended. The four of them bustled to their next class, History of Magic. Harry had always liked history and looked forward to the class. She had read a bit of the book which seemed to concentrate on goblin wars. She was even enthralled that their teacher was a ghost. She was asleep in under ten minutes.

Lunch was a very welcome respite. Hermione and Harry left Ron to his table manners, he was a bit edgy after Potions. After all if your going to train lions its best to wait for their good days, as Siegfried said.

The week went by quickly but seemed to take forever. Everything was new and more difficult because of that. Harry loved Charms the best, Professor Flitwick was a great teacher and a very nice man. Her Aunt was a great teacher who used an aloof and cool manner to maintain order in her classes. Seeing her act so when Harry knew how funny and kind she was unsettled Harry quite a lot. It would take some adjustment to get used to Professor McGonagall being her Aunt Minerva.

The four of them spent the weekend doing their assignments and preparing for the coming week. They were determined to give Snape no excuse to deduct points from them. He seemed to be inordinately interested in their little group.

Ron was resistant to the extra reading and preparation for potions. The group had their first real disagreement over it. Hermione was willing to nag him to do the work but Harry wasn't.

"Ron if you don't want to do the work it will take to do well in potions it's up to you. Don't ask for help later though. I will help you so long as you are willing to work. You stop, I stop. Hermione do you agree?"

Hermione bit her lip and nodded. Neville clapped him on the back and said.

"They do have a point mate."

Ron sulked for the weekend and as a result had a horrible week in potions. Rather than endure Snape's vitriol Ron began to read the background texts that Hermione had ordered, the foundational material that Snape should have been teaching and they all pitched in to help him catch up. Neville was a natural in Herbology and helped the group through any rough spots there.

In a few weeks the first years were known to be the most serious of the Gryffindors in their study habits excluding fifth and seventh years who had their OWLS and NEWTS respectively.

Harry had taken to spending a bit of off time in the infirmary with her Aunt Poppy helping out where she could. They enjoyed the family time together and were working together on some pain relief potions when a student looked in and gave Harry a slip of paper. The Headmaster wanted to see Harry after dinner. Harry and his aunts had been expecting some move on the Headmasters part so this came as no surprise.

Harriet Pomfrey trudged up the stairs to the Headmasters office. She would start this first meeting alone. Even before she knocked the Headmaster called for her to enter. The Heads office was a beautiful and amazing place. Rich wood and fine carpets, rare books and masterpieces, a bright fire and most beautiful of all, Fawkes, the phoenix who had adopted Dumbeldore. Beside Fawkes was Hedwig.

"Hedwig! What are you doing here girl?"

Hedwig swooped over to land on Harry's shoulder and peck at her ear a bit. Fawkes joined her on Harry's other shoulder and cooed, running his bill through Harry's hair. Harry felt all her fears slip away under the influence of Fawkes.

"You sent for me sir?"

"Yes I did Miss Pomfrey. I was interested in your impressions of Hogwarts now that you have had time to settle in."

"That is your sole purpose sir? Do you intend to do the same with other first years?"

Dumbledore regarded Harry over his half moon glasses.

"Lemon drop Miss Pomfrey?"

"No Sir, thank you."

There was a long silence with Harry studying the furnishings and the Headmaster studying Harry. Fawkes made a noise that sounded a lot like a giggle.

"Fawkes thinks we are being childish Miss Pomfrey. While that is appropriate for you it is not for me. I have not, nor will I ask other first years their impression of Hogwarts, although it does seem a rather good idea. I hope through hearing your impressions of Hogwarts to form an impression about you dear girl. That is my primary purpose. Other decisions will be taken pending our conversation."

Harry turned to Fawkes and asked the phoenix,

"What should I do?"

Then she stilled into her tai chi meditation and waited. Harry sensed endless joy, boundless hope, and that her aunts should be present.

"Fawkes says to have my aunts here. He also thinks everything is hopeful and joyful no matter what we see as real. Do you think him right Professor?"

Fawkes appeared to be interested in the Headmaster's answer.

"He is undoubtedly right given his frame of reference, eternity. In the present he might find less hope for the near future."

Fawkes trilled disagreement. Hedwig affirmed. The Headmaster bowed to the birds.

"I stand corrected."

He stood and stepped to the fire, tossing some floo powder in and calling Minerva and Poppy to his office.

Once everyone was settled with tea the Headmaster began the discussion.

"I had asked Miss Pomfrey here to get to know her. I was disingenuous in my questioning. Miss Pomfrey was mistrustful of my intentions. She asked Fawkes for advice. Fawkes suggested that you ladies be in attendance at this meeting. And so we find ourselves here. May I begin again?"

The ladies nodded and sipped.

"How do you find Hogwarts Miss Pomfrey? I find myself very interested in your answer."

"I love the school sir. She is kind and loving and strong beyond anything I have felt. She is not currently very happy sir."

"I beg your pardon, am I to understand that you can talk to Hogwarts?"

"Not talk exactly sir, more like with Fawkes. I don't imagine she thinks like we do sir. She is slow and deep, like her stone and foundations."

"What is the nature of her unhappiness?"

"The hate and rivalry between the Houses. Slytherin especially has fallen from the path of light. She thinks the instruction needs improving. Potions, Defense, History and Muggle studies sir."

Harry was by now blushing furiously. Fawkes laughed and Hedwig cooed and preened Harry's hair. Minerva snorted and Poppy rolled her eyes. The headmaster regarded the family before him. He would have dismissed the opinion he had just heard if it wasn't for Fawkes. One did not dismiss something with which a phoenix agreed.

"Your suggestions Miss Pomfrey? I assume a young lady as astute as yourself would have suggestions?"

Harry squirmed in her chair, glancing at her aunts for a hint on how to proceed. Minerva murmured,

"Say what you like Harry, no one will fault you here."

"Attend some classes sir. You can judge the level of instruction if you witness it for yourself. Promote inter house unity with inter house projects. A dueling club, a student newspaper, an intramural Quidditch league, a school radio station, a school band, open tutoring for classes by upper year students for detention instead of scrubbing floors."

Harry's aunts were glowing. Hedwig was preening. Fawkes laughed again. The headmaster was flummoxed. There was a pause.

"Hermione and I have talked about it sir. She is very smart."

"Yes, well I shall certainly be busy for the next while starting all that. Tell me Miss Pomfrey, did your aunts discuss this with you?"

"Sir we have talked about their work but we have never talked about specific changes to make at Hogwarts. I was just comparing with my previous school. I wasn't coached to say any of this sir. OHH and sir! We desperately need a ski club!"

Everyone but Harry laughed.

"I believe that I will leave the ski club in your hands Miss Pomfrey. I should like to try it myself when conditions warrant."

"Let us now move to another matter. Miss Pomfrey you bear an amazing resemblance to a former student, Mr. James Potter. You share a birthday with his son, the missing Harry Potter. You even have a scar on your forehead exactly as young Mr. Potter had when I saw him last."

Harry looked at Minerva first then Poppy. They stared straight ahead, stiff. No clues there. "Fawkes?" was all Harry said. She concentrated with all her might on the phoenix. Again the boundless joy and hope. And a sense that the truth should be told if it was to be demanded.

"I was born Harry James Potter sir. You know my story better than I up to the time you left me at the Dursleys. I was with them for four months. I left their care with four broken ribs and a severely bruised spinal cord. Aunt Minerva had been keeping a close watch on the house and came to the casualty ward where I was being treated. I was malnourished and had been beaten several times before my ribs were broken and my spinal cord damaged. I would have been paralyzed if it hadn't been for magical healing. Aunt Minerva took me away and cleaned up the records so the paper trail ended in the casualty room. I was formally adopted by my aunts in a ceremony in New Guinea. The requirements are only that the parties be present, willing and the ritual completed. It is binding in both the magical and mundane world."

Fawkes crooned a warning to the headmaster. Slowly the icy fire died in his eyes. His voice was flat when he asked "Why was I not told?"

Minerva answered.

"Albus why are there Death Eaters walking free? What is the prophecy that Voldemort acted on? How did Harry survive the killing curse? Where is Voldemort now? What are you doing to end his existence? How can the bit of Voldemort's soul he left in Harry be removed without killing the child? Why is the thing you know Voldemort desires more than anything hidden in this school?"

Her voice rose with every question.

It had been a long time since anyone had called the Supreme Mugwump to task. Minerva, Harry, Poppy, Hedwig and Fawkes all cast the beady eye on the Headmaster. Poppy spoke softly, as she did when not in her ward.

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good to do nothing. Let's get to work."

Harry spoke up.

"I would like to hear the prophecy Headmaster."

Dumbledore sighed.

"I dare not tell you until you can guard your mind Harry. You must master Occulumenty before I can tell you the prophecy."

Minerva pounced.

"Albus that is a load of tosh. We can go to the Ministry and get the recording if we care to."

The Headmaster squirmed,

"True Minerva."

He didn't much like this McGonagall that was so independent.

"I think it would be unwise to have such a secret in such an unguarded place as Harry's mind."

"As unwise as having the Philosophers Stone in a school?"

There was another pause.

"What do you propose Minerva?"

"Put the stone in another location under the Fidelius Charm with you as secret keeper. Ask Pernel and Nicolas to come to Hogwarts for their protection and to teach potions and history respectively. Get rid of that ridiculous Quirrell and have Severus teach Defense. That should take care of our immediate concerns. You need to resign some of your positions and become much more active in the research into Harry's survival and the removal of the soul fragment without killing the child."

Fawkes laughed again. Dumbledore glared at him. If a phoenix could have a shiteating grin Fawkes had one.

Dumbledore did have more to say however.

"How has Harry not been found out? How is he able to enter the girls dormitory?"

Poppy answered softly.

"She truly is female Headmaster. I have even had the muggles check her DNA. She is completely female."

Dumbledore stuttered for a moment.

"Is this permanent?"

Harry answered.

"No headmaster, it is what I prefer, for now at least. So far I think we have been successful with our cover of adopted distant relative or the Potters and a rumor of a twin daughter taken at birth and raised by my aunts in San Francisco who had a brand put on her forehead in remembrance of her missing brother Harry Potter."

Albus nodded.

"Harry dear you are not the first, nor the last, but certainly the most complete. I do love magic."

Harry and Albus at that minute became friends. Albus drew his wand and swore,

"I will hold all matters discussed between those present this evening secret unless released by Harriet Pomfrey also know as Harry Potter on my magic I so swear."

There was a flash of an unbreakable vow being made.

"Further I abjure all portraits to silence in this matter as Headmaster and do command your obedience." There was a muttering of "aye" around the room.

"Minerva, Poppy, I look forward to your assistance in the research we have to conduct. Ladies it has been a most challenging evening. Thank you for your company. I have some resignation letters to write as well as Nicolas and Perenelle to convince. Perhaps I can inveigle Perenelle to head Slytherin. Severus should be agreeable given the defense posting. I think that the free Death Eaters might benefit from the same location as the stone don't you ladies?"

Laughter was general at this point.

DISCLAIMER: JKR and some corporations own Harry Potter. I don't. I make no money from this and appreciate being able to use her world.

Madam Hooch posted free times for pick up games of Quidditch in the following week. She also posted times for inter year games. The Potter vault took a hit to provide enough Nimbus 2000's for two Quidditch teams. The brooms were available for sign out when the pitch was open and were for team use for games. Madam's life was considerably busier than previous years when she had only to referee the House Cup games and teach the first years how to fly.

Harry had seen the Blue Angles during fleet week in San Francisco. She was interested in an acrobatic team. She got one person from every house to try it with her and they found they enjoyed it very much indeed. They were asked to open the Quidditch Cup games alongside the new school band. They were especially proud of the charm that cause contrails in the team colors on command.

Lee Jordan took to the school radio like a man possessed. He announced the House games over a WWN hookup and played a wild and joyful mix of magical and mundane music. He also aired a bit of the BBC World Service for those interested in the muggle news. The school paper was slow starting but some of the kids liked working on it and everyone read it.

The Flamels were at first difficult. They were not over eager to have so much structure to their time and they certainly didn't need the money or status. Minerva was finally able to break the deadlock between them and Albus by making Albus tell the Flamels the prophecy and the truth of Harry's life.

The firing of Quirrell was the stuff of legend. Albus had been his usual discrete self in his negotiations with the Flamels. Quirrell had no idea that he was about to lose his position when the Headmaster asked him for a word after the Halloween feast. Quirrell was very reluctant to agree but he did not refuse the Headmaster. They adjourned to the side chamber where the first years had waited to be sorted.

To most it sounded like a series of massive explosions. A few heard a fading shriek. No one failed to sense the enormous outpouring of magical energy generated by the combat.

Albus emerged from the chamber singing and with a palpable sense of power roaring about him. Harry understood how Voldemort would fear him. This wizard was so deeply magical that it was frightening. It seemed his look would crack stone or stop time. He stalked to the center of the Great Hall. His power became more contained as he moved until he seemed his normal self, a spry elderly gentleman in exotic robes. "Professor Quirrell has ah.. retired from Hogwarts to pursue other interests. Let us all wish him a safe journey to his end. Professor Snape has graciously accepted the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts. We will be welcoming a new Potions Master Nicolas Flamel. Additionally his wife Perenelle Flamel will take over instruction of History of Magic as well as Head of Slytherin House. If I could impose on the House ghosts to attend Professor Binns to ease his retirement from active teaching it would be most appreciated. Peeves your assistant is not required in this endeavor. It has been a full day for an old man and I am sure you all would like the opportunity to speculate endlessly on this evening's events so off you hop, to your common rooms please."

The four firsties sat close to the fire and wondered about the meeting in the side chamber. Seamus had seen a squad of Aurors running up the road from Hogsmeade as he dawdled his way from the Great Hall being hustled along by that pompous git Percy. They were pretty sure it had been a fight and a pretty good one at that. The others all wanted Harry to pretend upset and see if she could get any information from her aunts. Harry knew better. They wouldn't tell her and they were likely busy at the moment cleaning up the aftermath.

Over the next few days rumors flew about that Quirrell had been possessed by Voldemort and had died in a duel with Dumbledore. Opinions were split as to the final death of Voldemort. The Minister of Magic appeared on the scene to personally interview the Headmaster. Fudge left shortly after in a towering snit, stomping his feet and tearing at his bowler hat. The Weasley betting pool shifted to odds on that Voldemort survived the encounter.

Potions under the tutelage of Nicolas Flamel was a completely different experience from Snape. The room glowed with light and the air was fresh. The work surfaces glistened. House points were given for correct answers or good guesses and on occasion for funny guesses. Professor Flamel took care to explain the interaction of the

ingredients working towards an understanding of the likely results of certain ingredients being combined in certain ways. They had almost four months of revision to make up but as they worked it went faster and faster.

By the Christmas break they had caught up in potions and defense.

Snape was a genius in defense. He was firm and his grasp of the subject was impressive. He gave a demonstration duel with Professor Flitwick, a honored dueling champion, and Snape lost almost immediately. They dueled again by street rules and and Snape beat Flitwick badly. Snape fought like a Death Eater. He was nasty. He was sneaky. He wasn't fair. He was exactly what Harry needed in an instructor for magical combat.

Pernell's History of Magic was a revelation. She taught the subject as it interwove with muggle history. She claimed they could not be separated that muggle culture was so much larger and had so much more effect on the world that it was delusional to think of only magical history. She made a solid case for the Statute of Secrecy being implemented in response to the advent of easily available and effective firearms. Her analysis of the underpinnings of the legitimacy of the magical government was damning. She did point out that at some point every government was a product of a strong gang and became legitimate after the fact and first in it's own eyes. She had lived through the revolution in France and has watched Napoleon shake the world like a terrier with a rat. She had lived during the Inquisition. She created a school full of history buffs with her little asides about fascinating people and events and how magic had played into them.

Harry and Hermione were the only members of the ski club for a while. They eventually convinced a few other muggleborns to stay over Christmas and come skiing in the mountains around Hogwarts. Hermione's parents stayed at a nearby town with her and every morning they would drive up into the mountains, park their car and meet with some wizards to be apparated to the top of the best slopes for powder skiing. They deeply appreciated warming charms as well as cushioning charms and found themselves skiing at the edge of their abilities and having the time of their lives. The small group of screaming kids and parents tore down the mountains only to be popped to the top again by house elves.

Lunch was served Hogwarts style and most ate with Ron-ish gusto. Keeping warm and skiing that hard took a lot of energy. Poppy sent along a potion for the next day to ease sore muscles. On the final day of the holiday the Headmaster joined them with Fawkes and Hedwig. Albus would never be world class but he certainly did laugh a lot and was quite taken with the idea of doing more.

Harry had continued her training in tai chi as well as she was able without an instructor. She trained with Flitwick in swordsmanship. She kept up her regular physical exercise, running and weight training. At first her best friends joined her, Hermione, Neville and Ron. A few at a time the other Gryffindors in first year would join for parts of it.

It was Ron who dove into the martial arts aspect of the training. He loved tai chi. He pushed Harry for more and more advanced forms and would practice for hours. The mental discipline the training gave him did a lot to curb his Weasley temper and made him easier to be around. Harry and Ron would talk quietly about what their lives were like, Ron as the last boy of so many strong personalities, Harry about growing up with just a house elf for company. Harry missed Limpy terribly.

The House Cup looked to be in play for the first time since Snape had taken Head of Slytherin House. Ravenclaw was doing well from the points earned in academics. Slytherin was riding the massive point advantage from the beginning of the year but losing ground rapidly as Pernelle corrected the worst of their behavior. Hufflepuff's teamwork was showing them to be a likely second. A win by any of the other three houses for the Quidditch Cup would put that house in first and the puffs in second.

Harry had asked Flitwick for a special training aid. She remembered the Star Wars scene with Luke training to deflect blaster bolts by sensing them in the force. She was interested in a floating device that would shoot stinging hexes at her. Flitwick tried the saber and was beyond impressed. Harry's wouldn't work for him but what it could do in Harry's hand had him resolved to have one. Ever since creating her saber she wondered if she could deflect the Avada Kedevera. The two designed the safest test conditions they could imagine. Harry's saber was clamped to a block of stone in a stone room while Harry and Flitwick were behind a stone wall. Flitwick fired an AK at the blade. The light saber reflected the curse and

remained clamped to the table. They lightened the clamp force to approximately Harry's grip strength and tried again. Two handed Harry could deflect an AK all day. One handed she could deflect maybe two before losing her grip.

Harry began to train grip strength. Flitwick floored to Diagon Alley that next day. Soon they began to practicing with light sabers. Flitwick's blade was a deep blue. The two got Albus and escaped to the movies to see the Return of the Jedi. Soon Albus was training with them, his blade was a rich gold.

Harry spent hours with the practice golem trying to sense the stinging hexes the golem would send at her. Slowly she improved as her Occulumency improved. Her lessons were after saber practice with either Flitwick or Albus depending on their schedule.

Harry hit a growth spurt and went up like a weed. From being one of the shortest first year girls she was in a matter of months one of the tallest. She made a striking figure in the corridors of Hogwarts, her shining unruly black hair, her muscular slender body usually in black tights and black laced boots under her school skirt and some form of flowing blouse with loose sleeves. Often she sported a baseball cap. She liked the contrast with the school tie. The Slytherins were especially disdainful of her style. Often they could be heard calling her mudblood or blood traitor. Harry would laugh at them for their trouble. She had walked Haight-Ashbury, street insults meant nothing to her.

The quickest way to annoy a bully is to ignore their power. Millicent Blustrode was chosen for the demonstration of snake power. Millicent wasn't an evil girl, but she did understand how things worked in Slytherin no matter the new head of house. Malfoy ruled because Malfoy's father ruled. So when Malfoy told her to pound the little Pomfrey thats what Millie set out to do.

Millie cornered Harry alone in the courtyard. "Nothing personal Pomfrey, you need a message. You need to get some respect for the snakes, so I'm going to hurt you some."

Harry raised a dark elegant eyebrow (Lavender did have her uses) "I assume this is from that rodent Malfoy?" Millie nodded. "Millie, you and I have never had a problem. I don't like to fight people I don't dislike and have no reason to fight. How do you feel about that?" "I

don't care for it either really Harry, it's just how it is though." Harry nodded. "What about if I challenge Malfoy to a duel? Does that let you off the hook?" Millie smiled. She was almost pretty when she smiled. "That would do it yeah Harry."

Harry's eyes glowed emerald fire. "Excellent. Lets go find us a Malfoy rodent to smash Millie."

"Um Harry let me go first and kind of drag you along ok? He will go for it easier if he thinks you are already beaten." They both burst into laughter and shortly after arrived at the door of the Slytherin common room. Millie called out the password and yelled inside for Draco. Draco arrived on the bounce looking for blood spatters and about to ask about lengths of hospital stays. He found an unwounded but terrified Harry under the total control of Millie.

"Malfoy I challenge you to a duel. Millie says I need to learn proper respect for you. I think I would rather fight you than Millie." The gathering crowd roared. Millie became the top bitch of Slytherin that day, Malfoy had been challenged to fight a girl so there was no win for him either way, and he had no way to back out. Draco's opinion of Millie went up several notches. "I don't fight girls Pomfrey. Get a champion." "Well ok Draco I guess my champion is me. There is no way I'm not going to kick your stupid ass."

For the first time Draco looked right at Harry's eyes. There was no fear there. A deep deep hunger, but no fear. Draco felt like meat on the table. Ridiculous of course, he was a Malfoy, the son of a Malfoy, trained since he could talk in deceit and cunning. "I accept your silly challenge silly girl. I name hands and feet as the weapons, to yield or incapacitation. Who is your second." "I won't need one Draco." She was almost whispering and her eyes were even brighter.

Harry spoke loudly now. "Get your Head of House. I don't want to lose points over kicking this jerks ass." As if by magic Pernelle Flamel floated up the corridor. "So my snakes what have we here? A lion to visit? Charmed my dear, Harry isn't it?"

"Yes Ma'am. If I may, Millie was telling me she had been sent to teach me proper respect of Slytherins by Draco. We agreed that we didn't care to fight one another as we have no ill will between us. Mille and I decided that I would challenge Draco to a duel so he could teach me proper respect for his Draconess. I did challenge,

Draco accepted and offered me a chance to get a champion. I elected myself champion as I really can't pass up the chance to pound the crap out of the bigoted snot. He has elected physical combat to incapacitation or surrender. I have agreed. Would you referee our contest ma'am?"

Pernell smiled like the sun after a shower. "Malfoy you are a total fool. 10 points from Slytherin and 50 more if you lose as I expect you will. Miss Blustrode 20 points to you, very clever. Let us adjourn to the Great Hall."

Draco fumed and tried to settle himself. He had the training, he had the money, he had the father, he had Crabbe and Goyle on either side of him, he owned his house. This evening he would crush the little lion bitch and move on to the rest of the lions. Snakebite is often fatal.

Since no announcement was made everyone knew instantly, the Hall was filling at flood rate as the group entered.

Professor Flitwick prepared the arena and whispered to Harry. "Don't be fancy, He will do something deadly and dirty, poison ring or something like that. Stay clear and only hit flesh." Harry's eyes widened a bit. She hadn't considered poison. She concentrate on her muscles and reactions, poured her magic into being as strong and as fast as possible. Her outline didn't change much. She took her robe off, and her school shirt and skirt. The wand holsters were invisible. She glanced at Flitwick, He gave a tiny nod. Keep them. She stood in her black tights and a black body suit all form fitting looking fit as an Olympic gymnast. There was nothing to grab, no easy hold on her but her hair. She tucked it into her ball cap and was ready.

Madam Flamel cast Sonorus on herself. "Both contestants remove all jewelry please. Professor Flitwick please see that is the case." Harry wore no jewelry. Draco gave up two rings and a necklace. After another word with Flitwick he gave up another ring. He hadn't wanted to give up that last ring. Flitwick winked at Harry. Draco was clean. Draco kept his shoes on. Harry caught Flitwick's eye and glanced at Draco's shoes. Flitwick pulled his wand and scanned them. There was a short snarling exchange and the shoes came off. Harry caught an eye roll from Filius. No assumptions then.

Madam Flamel said simply "begin". Harry walked towards Draco studying his balance and movement. They circled for a bit, faked a few passes, neither committing to a blow. Draco turned in an opening for a hip throw and Harry just stepped back to see what he would do. He was competent at the mechanics and it looked like a bit of metal stuck out of his belt. This boy was tiresome. Draco didn't like the silence from Harry or the crowd laughing and wondering if anyone was going to hit anyone else. "Scared Scarhead?" Harry just grinned and shook her head no. She shifted directions to center herself on the floor. He came at her in a rush, fast and fluid leading with an elbow strike to the chest. Harry faded to the side and boomed a kick to the back of his neck. She could hear the vertebrate pop and Draco land at the edge of the mat 15 feet from where her foot had met him.

Harry trudged to her clothes. The hall rang in silence as her Aunt Poppy rushed over to Draco and put his neck in traction. Harry caught her look and winced at the reaming she would be getting. Murmurs bounced off the walls. "Two crushed vertebrates, may never walk again."

Harry dressed calmly. Once finished she cast sonorus on herself, her husky voice echoed in the Great Hall. "I have great respect for Slytherin House." Harry left the hall to await events.

She moved like an automaton up the stairs to the Headmaster's office. She sat against the wall with her head on her knees and centered herself but found no peace.

Eventually the Headmaster arrived. She could tell when he woke her with a gentle hand to the nape of her neck. Just where her hardened foot had crushed Malfoy's spine. "Come in my dear, I will inform your aunts that you are found."

"How is he?" "He is very gravely injured" "Will he recover?" "He may, he will have the best care money can buy. I suspect he is not so injured as he is being portrayed." "What does Aunt Poppy say?" "That he has two crushed vertebrate and sever bruising of the spinal cord. I am sure you appreciate the irony." Harry sighed and sat back covering her eyes with a trembling hand. "Fawkes?" was all she said. Fawkes gave a long call then settled on Harry's shoulder gently. Seconds later Hedwig landed on her other shoulder. Hedwig burrowed into Harry's mop of hair.

"Why did you fight him?" "To break his control of his house." "Do you think you attained your goal?" "Perhaps partially. Sympathy is not strength. Those with some honor will be swayed by the amount of times it was attempted to disarm him." "Attempted?" "Yes his belt had some small spikes in it, I expect a fast acting poison." Albus turned to the floo and spoke into it for a moment. "So your strike was to end the contest immediately without coming into contact with him?"

Harry looked at the Headmaster puzzled. "Of course. Professor Flitwick took three tries to get him disarmed. He gave up and warned me to watch him." "I did not see that." "The professor and I practice together often, I am used to reading him." "The shoes." Harry nodded and sighed. "Yes the shoes. I suspected a hidden knife. Was there?" "Yes as well as a toxin on a rough edge. Not enough to poison you, but enough to slow you down."

Harry sighed again. "Whats next?"

It was the Headmasters turn to sigh. "Much kerfluffle, many meetings, much posturing, perhaps a few board meetings, jockeying for position, in short business as usual in the Slytherin world."

Harry leaned back. "Despite everything I think we gain a little. He had every advantage, he started it, he set it up, and he accepted my challenge and then he got his ass beat by a girl. He couldn't even cheat his way clear. I can talk to Millie now."

"I agree on an impersonal level. On a personal level you almost killed someone tonight. You are deeply traumatized by that fact no matter if you deny it. Fighting always hurts, sometimes winning more than losing." Harry nodded agreement.

Harry stood. She had to go, she wouldn't cry here. "Harry find someone to hold you this evening. I would think Minerva. Poppy is rather busy at the moment. An excellent analysis and fight." Harry nodded once and stumbled from the room with Fawkes and Hedwig riding a shoulder each. They made their way to the Transfiguration Office and knocked. Minerva rocked her long into the night, her Harry and her birds.

Draco came back to class quite subdued and Slytherin was a bit different. The name Malfoy had less luster to the masses and a lot less luster to those in the know. The boy had enough poisons and knives concealed about him to supply half of Knockturn Alley and a little American girl had almost killed him with one hit. Other Death Eater fathers had been quietly going missing for months now. It seemed the rules had changed.

Minister Fudge was quite worried as his sources of illegal income dried up. Madam Flamel was making her influence known in her new house. The cross house clubs and teams were breaking down the hard walls around Houses. Harry sensed Hogwarts approved.

The dedicated of the skiers were getting the last of the spring skiing, complete with rancid conditions and beautiful weather. They all had tans above their collar lines which many of the pure-bloods thought made them look like field hands. Ron was not an elegant skier, but he was strong and determined once he had felt the rush of speed limited only by your courage and the hill. Neville was more for the nature of it, the pristine quiet of the back of beyond. Hermione and Harry were vertical terrors. Hermione may not have liked to fly but she loved steep and deep. The two were deep in planning for an assault on the alps the following winter.

Harry went in with Ron and Hermione to get Neville a new wand. He used his fathers and it didn't work at all well for him. Ron got a bit of dragon hide to make a pair of holsters and struggled to learn the charms for anti summoning and invisibility. Aunt Minerva took Neville to Diagon Alley, to Ollivanders, one weekend and got him a proper wand. Nev immediately improved dramatically in his wand courses. To say that he was moved would have been a big understatement.

Finally the revision for exams began and once Hermione got the bit in her teeth there was no stopping her. The whole of the first year lions marched to her drum. For herself and Harry she beat double time. Hermione was always either top of the class or second, while Harry was always top in defense and close to the top in everything else once the teachers had been sorted.

Lavender attempted a breakdown to get out of studying but Hermione wasn't having it. Seamus did manage to skive off a night with the aid of the Weasley twins and some firewhiskey but declared

it just wasn't worth it the next day. Hermione knew perfectly well how to brew a hangover remedy but thought she should take a long term view of the problem. After all there were six more years of exams to take.

Eventually the exams were over and the trunks were packed. Hermione was pleased with her results, she was the best in their year, Harry was pleased with hers, she placed 4th in the school and first in defense. The others were all glad it was over and Hermione would let them be. The Gryffindor first years tied with Ravenclaw's firsts for academic honors for the first time in living memory. Ravenclaw took the Quidditch cup and Hufflepuff the House cup. Draco's loss of points for losing to Harry cinched Slytherins last place finish in the House standings.

Harry exchanged floo addresses and phone numbers and hugged anyone that would hold still for a minute. She had made great friends, and was eager for next year. She certainly felt a lot better about Hogwarts than when she arrived. As she walked out the door to leave for Hogsmeade she saw the thestrals. She laid a hand on the stonework of the entrance and wished the castle that had sheltered her well. The old strong stone seemed to smile around her. Willowy and light she danced to meet the new animals.

Harry and her aunts caught an international port key out of Heathrow arriving in San Francisco within an hour of leaving the Express at Kings Cross. It was a bittersweet homecoming, they were only back to pack up their household and finalize the sale. They made a tremendous amount of money on the sale, real estate in San Francisco was becoming fabulously expensive.

The family bought a small house outside of Hogsmede with considerable land, they could get electricity but were close enough that magic would be unremarked. The property backed up to the mountains behind Hogwarts that Harry had grown to love. There was a decent garden to either ignore or not. Minerva and Poppy went in on the property as they had on the house in San Francisco. Within days they were all back in Scotland and happy for it.

Harry and Limpy wandered the fields and hills of their new home happily exploring what was to be found. It was a perfectly good day for not worrying. Her aunts were in the kitchen worried about a lack of progress on some major issues.

Voldemort was still out there. Harry still had a bit of Voldemort in her. Harry's training needed to move ahead faster. Minerva let a discrete advertisement for a tutor in advanced defense. She received only one viable reply. Remus John Lupin was looking for work.

The three ladies and Limpy sat down at the kitchen table for a family discussion. Minerva started with a heavy volley. "Harry dear, you know that Voldemort isn't dead yet, and that he may gain a body at any time. Your training has been somewhat stagnant while you were at school. You had a good deal to be getting on with and did very well. Now we need to do more. We are thinking of hiring a tutor for you dear, a man who holds a Mastery in Defense. He has seen combat against Death Eaters many times. He was one of your parents dearest friends. We would like to interview him. Would you like to be present?"

Well that was a throw away question. "Yes ma'am I would like to be there. When will we meet him?" Poppy relaxed now that it looked like the Harry fireworks wouldn't start. "He should be here in an hour or so dear. Why don't you get cleaned up and put on something nice?" Limpy's ears went back and down. Harry and "putting on something nice" usually led to a spectacular row after a fashion explosion.

Limpby hated the grunge look. Harry sighed and stalked upstairs to shower and change. The aunties placed their bets on just how she would interpret "something nice" and the relative volume of the interview. It was their major source of entertainment, Harry wagers. Poppy was ahead lifetime by 238 galleons, but Minerva had surged following the duel with Draco by winning a 50 galleon bet that Harry wouldn't be in another fight that year.

Harry waited them out. Remus was seated and sipping tea when Harry slipped into the room. She had gone for an ivory colored cotton blouse with the loose sleeves she favored and a pair of hip hugger khaki pants tucked into her Frye boots. She had even attempted to comb her lustrous black mop into order.

"Remus allow me to introduce our adopted daughter Harriet Pomfrey." Remus stood and turned to look at her. He promptly dropped his cup of tea. He stared at Harry as Limpby made quick work of the remove and repair operation. Two wands were covering Lupin's back. "Harry! How is this possible?" He sniffed deeply and shook his head. "Harry?"

Poppy stood and took him by the elbow. "Please have a seat Remus. Harriet would you like tea?" "Yes please Auntie." Each aunt had won a wager. Harry was decent and polite. Interest mounted. Harry sat primly, feet gathered neatly under her, hands on her knees facing Remus. Minerva smirked. The girl was ready to lunge with a drawn saber in an instant. Aunt Poppy put the tea at Harry's right side never getting in front of her. Harry's long slender fingers felt for the cup while watching their guests hands.

"How should we proceed ladies? I must say it is very good to see you again Harry. I have feared you dead for many years." Harry's hand eased back to her knee. "My name is Harriet sir, I don't think we have met."

Remus inclined his head acknowledging the correction. "Harriet I am a werewolf. Part of lycanthropy is a heightening of the senses especially the sense of smell. I knew your parents very well and I know your scent. I first met you when you were minutes old. You were born a boy, Harry James Potter whatever changes may have come since. How did you become a girl Harriet?" The room was very still.

"Magic" was all she said.

Remus smiled a huge smile. "Lily must be so pleased!" He began to laugh.

Remus joined the family in that minute although it would be weeks before any of them realized it. He was offered a bedroom in the main house or his own place in a stone outbuilding of good size if he would care to do the work to make it habitable. He chose the bedroom while the remodeling commenced.

Harry spent hours reading the books Remus suggested. She and Remus worked for hours in the barn dueling with wands and swords. The whole family worked together to put up a modest greenhouse required to grow the potions ingredients for Wolfsbane potion. Remus made himself a shelter for his changes. Poppy had helped him through his changes for seven years, she knew how to care for his pain after being the wolf. Remus was a gifted and exacting teacher. He pushed Harry physically, magically and mentally as hard as he judged consistent with her happiness.

Harry saw Remus emerge from his cage after the first full moon at the farm, disheveled, torn and in obvious pain. It was the next day that Harry showed Remus her saber.

"Is that a light saber? What a beautiful illusion Harry! How did you create it?" Harry place the tip of the blade against a boulder and shoved it in until the handle met the surface of the basalt. She pried up and the blade cleaved through the stone like a knife through water. She shut it off and handed it to him. "Be very careful of it Remus, it takes some getting used to."

Remus lit it off and grinned the huge grin of everyone who handled a light saber. He held the saber in two hands and took a full cricket swing at the hapless boulder easily decapitating it. He spun almost in a circle. There had been no real resistance.

"If you have a spare wand I can make you one. They can deflect a killing curse." "What about wards?" "They go through them but the wards seal behind them instantly." "Who else knows about this?" "The Headmaster, Professor Flitwick, the aunties and I." "Young lady I see a long line of headless death eaters before us." Remus

had a saber the next day. He wondered what he would see if he took it apart. He didn't.

Remus and Harry spent hours together just talking while they worked on his new house. They talked a lot about her parents, as much as Harry wanted. She learned the most about her father from Remus as he was one of James best friends. There were four boys in their little Gryffindor group and they called themselves the Marauders. Each had a nickname; Moony, Padfoot, Wormtail and Prongs. Remus was of course Moony, Padfoot was James closest friend Sirius Black, and Wormtail was Peter Pettigrew, Prongs was James. Harry began training to be an animagus as the result of the story. She hoped to be something sleek and fierce of course.

Remus and Harry had one very emotional talk about Harry's parents and their murders. "Do you remember them at all Harry?" Harry sighed and put down the broom she was using to sweep up the days sawdust and bent nails. "Not really, I have dreams. One of screaming and a green flash and once in a while a flying motorcycle." Remus was putting away the tools for the evening. His hands shook. "It was the worst night of my life Harry. I had been estranged from your parents for a bit, and very much regret not being closer. I might have been able to save them." Harry couldn't help but ask. "Why the estrangement?" Remus shook his head, "There was a traitor, we didn't know who. Someone was passing information about your parents location. I thought it was Sirius and told your father so. He wouldn't hear a word against Sirius, and he drew away from me. I think he suspected me of being the traitor." "What did mum think?" "I am not sure. I know that she was very unhappy. She had gone back to work at the Department of Mysteries for a while but quit when they went into hiding. It was a terrible time for all of us." "Did you ever learn who the traitor was?" Remus nodded, his hands still shook a bit. He was staring off into the hills, his eyes moist. "Sirius. I never would have thought it, but it was Sirius. He was their secret keeper. I asked James to make me the keeper, he refused. It was the last time I spoke to him" "Does whoever cast the charm remember the secret keeper?" "No, only the keeper remembers anything protected by the Fidelius." "Remus? Will you take me to see them some day? I have never been, I would like to see them." He nodded, and they held hands walking back to the kitchen for dinner.

Harry told Remus about the steady decline in free Death Eaters that the Headmaster was overseeing after resigning from a few of his positions. Very quietly the Ministry was being purged a cell at a time. The remnants of Voldemort's forces had to be aware they were being culled. However the execution was flawless, never a clue as to how the captures were made. Remus made an appointment to talk to the Headmaster. Marauder honor demanded he take part in the stalking of Voldemort's servants.

Remus walked to Hogwarts early in June to see the Headmaster. He was met at the gate by Severus Snape. Remus said hello, got a nod in return and the two of them began the walk to the Head's office. "Severus I should like to apologize for my behavior towards you during our school years." Snape made no comment only walked on as if nothing had been said. They reached the Headmaster's office, Snape gave the password and they were soon sitting in comfortable chintz chairs before Albus.

"Remus it is good to see you, how have you been?" Remus made some small talk concerning his life since he had last seen the Headmaster. Albus worked the conversation around to the reason for the visit. "Headmaster what I have to say is for your ears only. No slight is intended Severus, please do excuse us." Snape raised his eyebrows at Albus who gave the barest of nods, he left without a word. "And so to it Remus, how can I help you?"

"I was speaking with a mutual acquaintance of ours who is of the impression that many of the free followers of Lord Voldemort were quietly and efficiently disappearing recently. I would be grateful if you could put me in touch with the organization doing this good work. I should like to offer my help. One such person still free is Fenrir Greyback. I am uniquely qualified to assist in his capture and well motivated as you may imagine." Remus acquired a side job that day he enjoyed very much.

Minerva continued to teach Harry as much transfiguration as Harry would hold still for and Poppy coached her in field medicine and some more advanced first aid spells. Harry could reliably set bones and correctly use emergency potions. She could heal massive cuts and restore blood volume. Beyond that Poppy taught her a stasis charm and gave her a supply of portkeys targeted to St. Mungo's.

It was the end of June when the family went to Rome. Albus was not coming up with answers and it was time to check other sources. Remus had made the suggestion that the Catholic church had been collecting information for a long time.

They flew British Airways out of Heathrow. Going muggle with the kind of paperwork goblins loved to charge many galleons to create made tracing their movements a lot more difficult for either the magical or the mundane authorities. Harry had been able to get Hermione included on the trip. It was Hermione heaven. Research in one of the greatest archives in the world to help her best friend.

The adults were waving letters of introduction to snippy secretaries while the girls were busy at the fancy computerized catalog system in the main archive.

Hermione sat at the console with a practiced air and began running queries. At first she got rapid responses and asked for interlibrary loan of some volumes to Hogwarts. After that the responses became much more studied. She queried for soul fragment, possession by, removal of. There was a long pause. The response was "Reference Librarian at carousel 8 will assist you with your query." Hermione was aflutter. Reference librarians knew everything! Harry held Limpy's disillusioned hand and made sure her saber could come clear fast.

The reference librarian turned out to be a tiny wizened old nut of a nun in a truly silly medieval costume by the name of Sister Allerita.

She looked at them and cackled. "Well two young witches from Hogwarts and a house elf. This is looking to be an interesting day. I was monitoring your queries. You are asking dangerous questions on an unsecured network. Just how stupid are you?" Hermione gaped.

Harry answered instinctively "Fairly dense ma'am, how about you? Three magicals of unknown ability and intent walk up to you in an unsecured area and you bait them." Harry watched the cheerful glimmer in the old woman's eyes flash to an icy intent for an instant. It was gone, but not before Hermione caught it. Limpy's ears went fully down and back and she smiled a little. She had very sharp teeth.

Sister Allerita smiled at Limpy. Harry and Hermione had long ago developed a code for communication by body language and hand movement. Harry signed "Danger, Caution." Hermione agreed wholeheartedly. Hermione signed "Limpy first, us no threat." Harry registered extreme disagreement. Hermione laughed out loud. The girls spread to either side of Limpy opening the field of fire. "The Inquisition ended in the 1860's didn't it Hermione?" "Not that long ago for a witch was it Limpy?" Limpy agreed "Not long at all Miss Hermione." "What will you tell us of our inquiries Sister?" Harry concentrated on Fawkes. The beautiful flare of phoenix fire gave way to Fawkes who landed neatly on Harry's shoulder. Hedwig landed on her other shoulder. "Showoff" Limpy hated it when Harry drew attention.

Harry communed with Fawkes for a bit. "She is like Albus, she has her own game. Fawkes can get us out if we need to go, it's safe to go with her for a bit I think." The good sister had dropped the gleaming smile and seemed much more formidable. They trooped away down a mundane hallway with common office doors. It was possibly the least magical setting imaginable. They entered an elevator, the sister used a key and pressed a down button. It was quite some time before the elevator slowed. They rode in silence the whole way. Fawkes was undisturbed so Harry wasn't frantic. The elevator opened into another era. Huge racks full of scrolls and mammoth bookshelves crammed with all kinds of books from paperbacks to leather bound hand lettered manuscripts. There was a strong sense of magic in the air. "Stasis charms?" The little nun nodded. "The best way really. Please follow me." The little group moved off down one of the main aisles. "Where are we going ma'am?" Sister Allerita laughed. "To see an expert. Perhaps she will have answers for you."

The odd group entered an office and stood before a middle aged woman dressed in simple modern clothes. Very sensible shoes. She had dark hair, just frosted with gray, good skin and a plain attractive face. Her eyes were an unusual violet color. She would have looked better 20 pounds lighter but was by no means obese. She looked like someones mother. She was holding a folder, looking at each of them in turn for a appreciable amount of time. "Thank you sister, that will be all." The good sister nodded and left the room.

"My name is Hildegard von Bigen, I am an abbess. I have spent my life in the service of the church and in opposition to those that hate her. Do you hate her?"

Hermione answered "Not personally, I detest some of what was done in her name, or at her order in the past, but I have no vendetta and mean no harm based on what I know of her current activities." Harry nodded agreement. Fawkes spread his wings and sang a bit. It sounded like watching and caution. Hedwig rustled and turned a sharp eye to the abbess. Limpy's ears were up and forward, cupped to catch any hint. The group eased apart.

Harry asked "Do you intend us harm ma'am?" The woman was silent for a long time. "We are at an impasse. Neither of us trusts the other. To move forward we must have trust. How would you propose to establish this trust?"

Hermione took a turn. "Look at us. An Abbess, two very young witches, a house elf, an owl and a phoenix. It sounds like the start of a bad joke. That the phoenix stays with us vouches that all of us serve the light. I think that fact is enough to move us beyond the silent measuring stage into the actual exchange of information stage."

"My name is Herimone Granger, I am a student at Hogwarts. My friend is Harriet Pomfrey, also a student. Fawkes is the phoenix and has his own purposes, Limpy is bound to the family of Harriet and the beautiful owl is Harriet's familiar Hedwig. I assume you are aware of our search queries?"

"Yes I am. You strung together a very interesting series of concepts. I am aware of the events of Halloween night 1981 at Godric's Hollow. Am I correct in assuming you seek assistance in ameliorating some side effect of that evenings events?"

Harry nodded. This lady was as sharp as Hermione.

"Something might be possible. I will need to conduct some tests on you Harriet. Do I have your permission to do so?"

"No Ma'am, not without my guardians and tutor present."

The Abbess nodded. She turned and cast a patronus which whisked away before they could see its form. "They will arrive shortly."

In seconds Minerva, Poppy, and Remus ported into the office. All looked distinctly grumpy before shock and anger took over.

"What have you two gotten into now? Limpy you were supposed to keep them from mischief!" Minerva always started with a good offense. Limpy began to mutter rebelliously about the labors of Sampson.

The Abbess introduced herself again and the adults tendered their letters of introduction to the person they had been trying to reach for three days. It had pleased the Abbess to hold off meeting with the adults until she knew what they were after. Once all feathers were unruffled and tea handed around to the amusement of Fawkes the group got down to negotiations. Under the watchful eye of Poppy the Abbess confirmed the presence of a bit of Riddles' soul in Harriet. Further consultation was required.

Shortly a tall well made man stepped from the fire and smiled at the assembly. "I am Father Ralph. I have made a study of similar situations, not precisely the same, but similar. Those cases I know were demonic possession rather than an apparent attachment by a soul fragment. Exorcism is a rite the church uses to banish demonic possession. If I may suggest it in this case it could do no harm and might help. It would at least provide information even if of a negative nature." Harry asked Fawkes who didn't have an opinion. "Yes please let's try that then." Harry's family agreed.

Father Ralph led them to a ritual chamber and prepared Harry. Harry was dressed in a plain white shift, ankle length. She had to surrender her wand and saber as well as all jewelry. She lay on an altar. Her family was gathered about the room and had been instructed to not interfere as the veil between the world and the beyond was greatly weakened by the ritual. It would be broadly judged a bad thing if demons poured through the veil due to an injudicious action.

The abbess and the priest began their ritual. They didn't use wands but instead potions, incantations and runes. The key to the ritual seemed to be the runes. In holy oil a rune for separation was traced over the scar on Harry's head. In holy ashes a rune for summoning

was traced atop that. In holy water a rune for banishment was drawn last. Harry groaned and spoke in a voice not hers. "Who calls? Who dares to disturb Lord Voldemort?"

The room was filled with an icy dreadful cold. Hope died in their hearts. Harry was lost to the evil inside her, they had freed the shade and failed to call it forth. Harry's body laughed Voldemort's laugh. "I am risen again at the hands of the Roman fools and in the body of the one who nearly destroyed me." Laughter like screams filled the sanctuary.

Fawkes sang softly and low. Warmth flowed back into the room and the shade of Riddle lost its overwhelming power. Harry's body writhed on the alter, she was screaming in agony. The priest and the abbess chanted the first incantation, the incantation of separation. Harry's body eased and a black mist shot with red streaks formed slowly around Harry. They chanted the incantation of summoning. The black mist crept from Harry, heavy, turgid as a Louisiana oil slick. The mist tried to approach the others in the room, Fawkes stood guard, the mist could not abide him. Finally the last of the mist pulled away from Harry and swirled into an dense globular form.

The song of Fawkes strengthened, bringing energy and hope to the Priest and the Abbess. Their voices were united and strong in the incantation of banishment. At the incantations ending time hung still. A glowing rent opened over Harry and golden light, a light not seen since the making, filled the room, Fawkes could bear it, and bore it with a great joy, leaping up from Harry's shoulder and soaring into the opening. The shade was pulled along after the phoenix, as a crow in the slipstream of an eagle. Hedwig gave a call and dove into the opening just as it closed. Harry lay slumped on the altar. Her family stood stunned, crying. None living had seen the light of heaven. The priest and the abbess were passed out on the floor. Poppy did what she knew to do, she checked her patients.

Harry had an inner glow that Poppy couldn't see, but could sense. She failed to detect it with any of her scans. She was however certain of its existence. Harry's magical core was a bit larger than it had been. Her magic was different, it seemed in some undefined way clarified, refined.

Poppy left Harry to sleep under a warming charm. She assured the rest that Harry was well so far as she could tell. The healer turned to

Father Ralph and the Abbess. They were deeply asleep and their reserves were nearly exhausted. Poppy didn't quite think they used magic, at least not magic as she understood it, though she could detect a power in them. She made them comfortable.

Finally Poppy cast the spell that had detected the bit of Riddle's soul in Harry. Riddle was gone. Beyond doubt only Harry was present in Harry now. Her scar was appreciably lighter.

It was Remus who took charge of the family. He left a note on the altar with their thanks, and their address in Hogsmeade along with a request for further conversation. He left his pledge of a life debt for their work on behalf of Harry who he considered his cub, his daughter. He asked for their utmost discretion.

They gathered together, Harry asleep in Remus's arms and portkeyed to their home. Harry was put to bed. Poppy handed out sleeping draughts to everyone including Limpy and insisted they all take them.

They took the draughts after casting every charm and ward they could think of on the house to ensure they were left undisturbed. Minerva had "borrowed" a set of ward stones from Hogwarts and set wards as strong as the castles. They slept the sleep of the just.

On the day following their return from Rome Hermione took a call from Father Ralph and the Abbess who insisted they talk to the group. "Yes Hello Abbess, Harriet is fine ma'am. Thank you for what you did. Would you like to speak to her?" Hermione gave Harry the handset and enjoyed seeing her bobble it about for a second. "Hello Abbess this is Harriet." She opened her mouth to say more but paused and listened intently. "Thank you for the information ma'am. Please allow me to talk to my family about it. If you would like we are at our home near Hogsmeade. Just get to the Three Broomsticks and Remus will meet you. A few moments then. Yes, goodbye."

Harry looked bemused. "She says she has important information we must hear. She and Father Ralph are on the way. I promised Remus would meet them at the Three Broomsticks." Poppy sent a Patronus streaking away to where Remus was working on his new quarters. "Remus?" asked Minerva just for confirmation. Poppy nodded.

The ladies adjourned to the sitting area. They had barely made the tea when their company joined them with Remus.

"Have you seen Hedwig?" Harry asked the Romans. They hadn't and Harry deflated. Minerva asked if the bit of Voldemort had been destroyed. The Romans couldn't say for certain, just that it had been sent to judgment. They had no idea why Fawkes and Hedwig had entered the gate. The Abbess spoke softly "We think that Riddle still exists in the worldly plane since the dark mark is still visible on his followers arms."

Remus filed away the tidbit that they either had a tame death eater or had a captive. Father Ralph continued "We can detect a soul fragment, called a horocrux, by use of an incantation that operates over a much greater distance than the spell Poppy used. If the fragment is contained in an inanimate object the object must be destroyed then the soul fragment banished by a the chant of exorcism.

The impromptu magic lesson in incantations was intense and short. They were highly motivated students and talented. Unfortunately there was no incantation to detect a dark mark that the Romans knew of. However there was an incantation to detect people who were evil. Another flurry of memorization with pronunciation corrections. The Romans were invited for New Years at the families house and left in good spirits.

Harry and Hermione trained and wandered in the mountains, helped Remus remodel, worked in the greenhouse and the garden, went shopping in Hogsmeade. They were having a good visit when several days later Harry was feeling awful and irritable. Harry suspected she knew what the aches and irritability meant. Menarche was upon her. Having a school nurse as your auntie meant that there was no escaping the Talk. She had been having the Talk for entirely too long so far as she was concerned.

She sidled up to Aunt Poppy and whispered the glad tidings. This is an important time for a witch as there exist rituals of power that could be done with the most benefit in the first month following menarche. The ceremony was far pre roman, perhaps pre druid. Almost all witches participated in the rituals. Here again the muggleborns were at a disadvantage. They often didn't get to learn of the rituals until menarche was past and so missed the full benefit

of the magically raised girls. Hermione and Harry could expect a large increase in their magical core as well as increased connection to it. Their magic would answer them more easily, and there would be more of it.

Harry was a miserable bitch for the next few days as Poppy had coaxed her body to do things she was decidedly not fond of and BOTTLE THE RESULT. Harry's mind was firmly made up that once this was over that would be IT. Unless she wanted children. Which was pretty damn unlikely given the way she felt. Hermione, her senior in this matter by many months, was feeling ever so superior. The prank deficit grew larger.

At the new moon following Harry's heroic passage to fertility Remus was told the ladies would be gone for a few days doing strictly girl stuff and to mind his own business for the next little while. The ladies adjourned to a small hotel in Edinburgh to rest and prepare for the ritual.

The ritual took place at a site sacred for millennia for this purpose. Both Harry and Hermione would undergo the ritual, they would do so together, there was a further benefit to preform the rite with someone you loved. The girls had decided since they were best friends forever they would become blood sisters as well. They met with a coven older than Christianity at a site known only to a few women. The ceremony was simple, powerful and beautiful.

Their ceremony was different from the usual one that concentrated on fertility and family. They decided they were to be warrior maidens, and blood sisters, so the powers called were different. The friends had asked that the blessing of the god of their Roman friends be included if that was possible to the ceremony. Harry and Hermione had talked a long time together about their part in the ceremony. They had to have clear in their own minds the powers they asked for and their reasons for asking.

It was a cool and clear evening, the stars bright, clear and near. As they lay waiting for the ceremony to begin Harry wondered again about using magic to visit the stars. Once that damn Voldemort was settled she wanted to work on getting to the stars. Her mind drifted at ease, buffered by the powerful potions they had been given. The girls lay side by side inside a runic circle, the runes were old beyond old, drawn in a paint containing their blood. Hermione and Harry had

cut their palms and their hands were bound together to symbolize their blood sister relationship. Harry felt a deep comfort with her hand in Hermione's, a sense of rightness.

The coven joined hands all chanting ancient words. It was a long chant in a language no one spoke other than for this purpose. The girls concentrated on what they hoped for and a vast power was worked through them. They felt the ground breathe, they understood the fire and loneliness of the stars, they knew that they were less than a blink and The Dark Lord less than a speck. A soft golden glow encircled the coven and the bare rock was covered with a long flowing grass that stirred in no wind. A sun that did not shine in their night sky softly bathed the maidens.

"Two warrior maidens ask the old blessings and the blessing of the One. They desire power not for themselves, and they shall have it. They desire to be joined and shall be. They desire justice with mercy and will both give it and receive it. Long have I waited for my warriors to return to me. SO MOTE IT BE!"

The light intensified until it was more than light, it seemed solid and living. It was impossible that the two girls could be alive under that mass. There was sound like phoenix song, but greater, grander. The coven could look on the scene, not blinded but certainly dumbfounded. The music ended and the light faded.

The two girls lay hand in hand on a bed of flowers. At their sides were staffs and at their feet was golden armor. They wore simple white shifts and sandals. Hedwig sat by Harry looking very very pleased with herself. A brilliantly white snowy owl was at the shoulder of Hermione watching all with an imperial eye.

At the Ministry of Magic several instruments that measured magical activity ceased to function. Witches across magical Britannia turned towards the ceremony trying to understand the massive pulse of magic that had just shot through them.

The coven brought the girls out from the ceremonial site along with the gifts of the goddess. Poppy was checking their health while Minerva was trying to find out what the hell had just happened. The girls were in perfect health and deeply asleep. To say that they had gain magical strength would be an extraordinary understatement. They were close to Dumbledore's power level in his prime. Poppy

unbound their hands, she was expecting to heal the cuts that mixed their blood but there was no need. Each girl had the same marking. A crescent moon in a field of seven stars.

Hermione and Harry slept for over a day. Remus paced outside the bedroom the young women were sleeping in. His werewolf sense of smell told him he had two daughters now. He had seen the armor and the staffs. He hadn't touched either. Discretion was called for when the gods intervened so directly. Finally he knocked and entered. Two tousled sleepyheads peeked at him over maroon and gold duvets. "Whats for breakfast Moony?" He grinned, a happy wolf. "Whatever you want. Get out of bed blessed girls, lets hear the story."

It turned out the blessed girls wanted pancakes and bacon and eggs and fruit and coffee. They made a tremendous mess in the kitchen much to Limpy's disgust. Poppy promised they would clean and the family went to table, The aunts, the wolf, the girls and Limpy. The girls story was easily told, they had drifted off on a sea of potions hoping for the power to defeat Voldemort, to help correct the ills of the magical Britannia and to be made sisters.

Hedwig and her new companion swooped into the room and lit on their mistresses. Hermione was beyond startled. The girl and the owl looked at one another for a long minute. "Her name is Athena" whispered Hermione. Harry looked at Hedwig and asked "Is Fawkes ok?" There was a moment. "She says he's fine, and back with the Headmaster. She says he will be doing some intensive retraining of him. She says the headmaster needs to be taken in hand and Fawkes is the bird for the job." The Marauder in Moony loved the idea. What if the Order of the Phoenix was actually led by the Phoenix? Then he flashed on Fawkes paper training the Headmaster to tell the truth. He sputtered in his coffee and made excuses under the beady eye of Minerva.

Breakfast and clean up finished it was time to examine their presents.

Their white shifts were of some unknown fabric, soft and strong. The sandals were old fashioned, just a sole and laces to the knee that held them in place, a soft golden brown leather. The armor looked to be gold. No one had touched the armor or the staffs. It was a matter of healthy respect Remus told himself, not fear.

Gifts from gods should be treated with great care, they were notably dangerous in the wrong hands. The armor was light, much lighter than if it had been gold. Harry tried to scratch it with a good knife, and dulled the knife. The surface of the armor was unmarred. The girls put the armor on and thought how martial and awesome they looked. They thought how it would be nice to wear it always but the attention it would draw would be pretty extreme. Diagon Alley would talk for years if they went shopping in their metal. The armor disillusioned itself perfectly as it sensed they wanted it unseen.

Finally the girls picked up their staffs. Four eyes went very wide indeed. The amount of power available through those staffs was terrifying. Remus led them outside and asked them to cast a reducto on the nearby hillside. It looked and sounded like 500 pound bombs had impacted the hill. Remus thought a moment. "She will have made it so you can always have them, see if you can put them away and call them." Hermione caught on first and her staff disappeared. She made her armor appear and disappear to the same place. Harry was a half second behind her. With a thought they were rearmed and armored.

Everyone met back in the kitchen except for Poppy who was answering calls repeatedly assuring everyone within hearing distance that Minerva's experimenting had caused an explosion, no one hurt, nothing to see here, move along.

Harry and Hermione were given a week off of lessons to adjust to their new power. They chaffed under what was actually a ban on them doing magic. Hermione insisted on bringing Harry home to meet her parents. The next day Remus dropped the girls off just before dinner at Hermione's house. Dan and Emma were expecting them and had dinner ready. Massive hugs seemed to be a Granger staple and everyone had their ribs tested.

Remus was asked to dinner and the Inquisition was called to order. It is very difficult to fool a parents loving eye. Eventually the history of the last hundred years of magical Britannia was retold and discussed. Grindewald, his influence on the second world war and the Headmasters defeat of him came out. Voldemort and his rise to power ending so abruptly in 1981. How Harry Potters family was shattered defying Voldemort and how the fight against Voldemort seemed to center on the Potters.

Dan rubbed the back of his neck and sighed. "So to recap, there is the spirit of a homicidal maniac who hates and kills people like Hermione looking to come back and do just that. There is a good portion of the magical world that will follow this Voldemort. The only one he's scared of is your Headmaster. Did I miss the part where your headmaster is doing everything he can to get rid of this spirit now? Before Voldemort can get a body to start killing with?"

Remus was a bit uncomfortable. "Dan you were in the service weren't you?" Dan nodded, it wasn't something he talked about a lot. He had been in an elite unit and had seen action. He could tell Remus was also a veteran of some war. It was in the eyes. "I imagine that you can't tell me parts of what you did during your active duty?" Dan nodded "Official Secrets Act."

"If you were able to step into an active role removing Voldemort's infrastructure would you?" "If I was truly needed I would Remus. The fact is I am a dentist, have been for many years. The military training is long behind me. I am wondering if it is safe for our daughter to be in the magical world and I am coming to the conclusion that it isn't."

Hermione got in the mix now. "Dad it is a case of fight him now or fight him later. He doesn't care what world I am in. He will hunt me down and kill me for the crime of being me." She turned to Remus. "Are we doing all we can or is the Headmaster dragging his feet?"

Remus looked at the ceiling. "There is a bit of foot dragging going on. He isn't moving very fast. Once he decided to take them he should have done it all at once. He's giving them time to go to ground. For some reason he won't clear me to go for Greyback." Emma asked who Greyback was. "He is a maniacal werewolf who is responsible for turning many of the werewolves alive now. He positions himself for maximum damage each full moon. He turned me when I was nine." I think the Headmaster is doing what he thinks he can with what he has." Remus paused for a moment. "He hasn't expanded his power base. He is using his most trusted lieutenants from the first war to take out the free Death Eaters. I just this minute realized there is a rather large group of people who will be highly motivated and who have never been asked to help. People like you Dan and Emma. The families of the Muggle borns."

"Would you be willing to undergo some training to be able to increase your chance of escaping from Voldemort and his Death Eaters?"

Harry hissed "Yes!" Hermione's eyes got big and excited.

Dan looked at Remus "Ever go hunting Remus?" Emma could feel her hair turning gray.

Dan and Remus sat late into the night planning the creation of a new force in the war. The Muggles would have a chance to be something other than sheep this time.

Minerva and Albus met with the men. Remus left the meeting with a listing of families of Muggle born magical children. called some men who had children in Hogwarts. Children that were special and amazing, who were magical, and asked those men, those families if they would been with him in very tight places. They met with Remus and were at first singularly unimpressed with the bookish middle aged man. Then they all went on a field trip to scout the area of operations. His woodcraft was miles beyond theirs, his tactical sense was exact and his strength had to be seen to be believed.

"Are they all like you Lupin?" O'Connor had served with Dan and had thought he missed it until they got into this operation. This was going to be a hairy bear of a fight. "No O'Connor, a few are stronger, a few are as smart, most are much, much meaner." This conversation had the effect of motivating O'Connor strongly.

Dan and his seven friends had found that all they had to do was mention some kind of equipment they wanted and it appeared at the next meeting. Remus would only say "magic" when asked how he had gotten some of the best and most secret hardware in any quartermasters stores.

Remus had managed to place tracking charms on several of Greyback pack. Minerva stood ready to create a portkey to the location of the pack the night of the full moon. She and Poppy would be along for magical support and healing. Remus took his Wolfsbane the night of the full moon and the team stood ready for the traces to move.

When the traces converged on a location Minerva created the portkey and the adults swept away in a swirl of color and light.

Harry looked at Hermione. "This sucks." Hermione nodded. "Limpy can you go keep an eye on them and come and get us if they get in trouble?" The soft pop of the elf disappearing seemed to indicate agreement. "Let's suit up Mione." Twenty minutes later Limpy popped to them grabbed them without a word and popped them away.

They arrived with a crack ten feet from a boiling mass of werewolves trying to get through a stockade Minerva had put up to defend the muggles and allow them to use their weapons. They were equipped with assault rifles loaded with silver bullets and had silver knives for close in work. They were deadly but woefully outnumbered. The girls looked around and saw a small group of wolves watching the slaughter at the stockade. The defenses were about to fail. Both girls called for their armor and staves. Together they cast "Duro", a spell that turned the logs of the stockade to stone. What had been closely spaced logs became 30 foot tall stonework with firing ports on the top. Most of the wolves were so lost in battle lust they still tore at the stonework. The rest charged the two young women in golden armor with staffs in one hand and a light saber in the other. The girls cast cutting curses and tore the ranks of wolves to shreds. The gunners in the stockade had to watch their fire. Dan would kill them if they shot his daughter.

The group around Greyback roared into action and charged the girls. The alpha pack covered the ground to the girls in a blink. They were met with glowing blades of light. Not understanding the danger the alpha's roared and jumped. Pieces of them dropped steaming to the cool ground. One of the girls muttered 'Ewww, gross'.

Greyback stood alone where his alphas had left him to charge the little girls. He threw back his head and howled his challenge. He was answered by a call to single combat for leadership of the pack.

Limpy popped Remus from the stockade to a spot before Greyback. They circled snarling. All present, wolf and human stood frozen watching the fate of the werewolves of England be decided.

Grayback would die tonight. He was under the sights of some very good shots and the vengeance of two very powerful cubs should Remus fall.

If Remus won, he had command of the pack and could bring it to heel, get them Wolfsbane and health care and food and decent places to live. The Potter vaults had enough to accomplish this at least for a while and eventually the community would support itself. But Remus had to defeat Grayback in single combat for the pack to accept his leadership and Grayback was possibly the strongest werewolf ever, as well as a depraved and skillful fighter.

It was a brutal fight. Remus underplayed his strength a bit through it all causing Grayback to become overconfident. Remus allowed himself to be injured and made the injuries seem worse, favored them more. Finally Grayback committed to a killing rush at Remus who sprang over him. Grayback was unable to check his momentum and slammed into the stone of the stockade stunning himself. Remus paced over to him and snarled once and ripped his throat out.

Remus called his pack to him, roaring at any who threatened his cubs. Limpy popped out the girls while Minerva portkeyed the combat team to the farm. Poppy was treating two new cases of lycanthropy in the combat team. It had gotten to knives at the stockade just as the girls had showed and made the crumbling wooden barrier into a stone fortress.

Harry held Hermione's hair while she was sick. They had killed tonight. Not an easy thing for a girl yet to be kissed. They were sworn warrior maidens of the goddess and they would recover. At the moment Hermione needed her mom. Limpy popped Emma to the farm.

Harry and Limpy moved among the fighters with tea and light food, a soft touch and blankets, cleaning charms and sleeping draughts. It was much like their trips of Golden Gate Park to tend to the homeless there. You did what you could to ease the pain and waited for the sun.

With the sun the team moved back to the battlefield. The werewolves hit with the silver bullets were dead, Some of the wolves around the girls were alive, the sabers cauterized as they cut,

sealing off blood loss. They all did what they could for the survivors and prepared to bury the dead.

Remus met with his new pack, sending those to work who could work, sending food to those who needed it, arranging shelter for those who didn't have it. The wounded were cared for and the many dead buried. Poppy saw a massive need for physical and mental health care. She called a family meeting for that evening. Hermione looked a bit nervous until Harry and Minerva made it clear that the Grangers were now family.

Once the pressing needs were taken care of and the most seriously injured sent to St. Mungo's they returned to the farm for some well deserved rest. Harry cuddled in with Poppy and Hermione with her parents. Remus slept alone under a potion Poppy had insisted he use. Minerva drifted in and out of sleep.

Remus called his pack leaders to a council meeting the next evening at the Three Broomsticks. They brought a list of their people and their living conditions. The next few days were a whirlwind round of discussions with Gringotts and Amelia Bones, the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. The Headmaster kept trying to weasel into the meetings.

The Potter trust was quite large. Harry's aunts by adopting her in New Guinea had become her magical and mundane guardians. They were able to draw on the interest of the Potter Trust. There was enough money to start doing what they needed to do to serve the werewolves. Fortunately there was land close to the farm that belonged to the Potters they could use to begin the community.

Madam Bones original interest had been in a pitched battle fought by secret forces that decimated a growing problem for the magical community. It didn't take her long to find Remus at the epicenter of the whole affair. She had the story out of him in short order.

They both thought it best to quietly announce that Grayback was found dead and offer no other details. Madam Bones visited the battle site and was a bit shocked at the fortification the combat team had used. Remus had to divulge a bit more detail about a wooden stockade about to fail and the sudden appearance of two very strong witches saving the day.

Amelia had never been a fool and was in Minerva's kitchen in an hour. She saw Poppy looking tired with a goodly amount of brewing going on, blood replenishment and burn creams. She saw that the house was chock full of people who seemed desperate and desperate to avoid her. She was especially interested in the two young witches moving about caring for the wounded.

"Minerva for a woman who sticks so fastidiously to the rules you surely do end up in some peculiar circumstances. This time you don't have the old long beard and quick fix. Care to tell a friend what happened?"

"Am I talking to my friend or the head of DMLE?"

"Let's start with friend first."

"Amelia the clean up after Voldemort's disembodiment was bungled. More than bungled. It wasn't done. The only Death Eaters who went to Azkaban were either too poor, too stupid, or too crazy to bribe their way out. Voldemort will be back, he has attempted to regain a body twice in two years. His support structure and his army were intact until this past year. His power base remains convinced of his cause. Voldemort need only return for his forces to rise again.

This battle was an effort to take away part of his army. You may have noticed that others who walked free aren't being seen recently. We have neutralized the werewolf population for the moment. Now we are involved in an effort to keep the werewolves away from Voldemort. We also hope to right a great wrong.

We want to offer hope for a reasonably happy life to any lycanthrope who will abide by a few simple rules. Accept Wolfsbane. Accept confinement during the full moon. Work to help to support those efforts."

"Do you expect Ministry support?"

"Expect? No of course not. One can dream. We would be quite happy to be left alone."

"I will see if that can be managed. Now for the parts you glossed over. Who fought? Who built that fortress? Who is financing this?"

"I will not tell you without an oath of secrecy Amelia."

"I think I can guess the answer Minerva."

"Then you realize why secrecy is required."

"I will do my best to keep the bigots quiet. I will ask in my name and in yours that mutual friends work to that same end. If another operation is planned I would like to be consulted. I agree with your assessment of the end of the war. Always a pleasure Minerva, give my best to Poppy and Harriet."

Harry and Hermione had long talks together as July got late. They talked about the battle when they needed to. They had both killed in those first frantic seconds of terror and slavering jaws. Harry's reflexes were freakishly fast, she tried to teach Hermione how to have her magic help her in the same way but it just didn't work for Hermione. One day Harry held Hermione's face in her hands, stroked her face softly and called up her magic, willing that Hermione be as strong as she and as fast and that her buck teeth be fixed. Hermione hated her front teeth.

Hermione was quite pleased with her smile when she opened her eyes, and amazed at her strength and speed. Duels between the girls were hard to watch, like humming bird wings. You knew they were there, but detail?

Harry had refused to have another period after the first. She was irritated by her little breasts. "My breastlings" she moaned to Aunt Poppy. Hermione was more fully developed in that department, and Harry was envious.

"Harry if you don't let your hormones do what they want to then they won't do what you want. Sorry dear it's just the way it is. With your magical power I am sure you can make your periods as easy as you like." Grumbling retreated up the mountainside. Limpy looked after Harry. "What do you think Limpy?" "I think the boys of Hogwarts had better be very careful Mistress." The two of them enjoyed a long laugh and took a tea break.

Harry took matters into her own hands that night. She concentrated totally on the body and face she wanted and asked her magic to give it to her. Poppy skidded into the bedroom in answer to the

agony of Harry's screams as her bones stretched and changed shape. Harry was crying from the pain and terrified while Poppy, Minerva, and Hermione tried to understand who this woman in Harry's bed was.

It appeared that Harry would be about six foot tall, rather broad of shoulder, slender with high firm breasts, slim waisted and toned belly, absolute perfection for a rear end and long slender muscular legs, delicate of knee and ankle.

There was a crisis. She appeared to be somewhere in the area of eighteen to twenty five and stunningly beautiful. Harry was not ready for the amount and type of attention she would garner. Men would fight over her smile. Women would go all protective and broody over their mates. Offers for a dalliance would be constant. She was twelve.

Hermione wanted Harry to do the same for her. Minerva and Poppy wanted Harry to change back RIGHT NOW YOUNG LADY! Remus kept sniffing for the scent of intruders after his cub. Harry could barely walk, her balance was a mess and her emotions were a wreck. Feelings she was just peeking at the edges of were in full flower. The riot changed venue to the kitchen for hot chocolate. "I CAN'T CHANGE BACK WITH ALL THIS YELLING!"

Poppy was frantically waving her wand for diagnostic readouts. "Minerva our little she demon is biologically about nineteen. Her magical core is quite low. She shouldn't attempt to do any major magic for a few days." Minerva put the beady eye on Harry. "Don't get used to this young lady. As much as I love and admire you, you are NOT ready for the attention this change would bring."

Remus was looking around for material to board up the windows and doors. Hermione was PISSED. She knew the adults would never let Harry do her and DAMN she wanted to know if she would look anywhere near as good.

Limp sat in a corner alternately laughing and crying. Harry was doing pretty well until Remus suggested stunning her until her core was full again. Then she rounded on him like a wolverine.

Eventually everyone calmed down. Harry insisted on pictures with Hermione on her lap. They got a group photo and Harry took a

sleeping drought to get some rest. The adults made it all such a BIG DEAL! It was hours before Hermione got to sleep.

It took Harry several days to recover and more days to regain something like her previous size and shape. "It's a lot harder to change when you don't want to! I am so trying!" She tried to hold out for a few inches in every dimension claiming it was the best she could do. The Aunties weren't having any and Remus was still prowling the property. Poppy set Limpy to trail him to see if he was really marking his territory. Minerva won the bet, nurture over nature in this case. Finally Harry settled for "a measly few inches height".

The girls worked very carefully on Hermione so she would catch up a bit. They had to go slow, but it was working. Hermione's hair was less of a wild entity of it's own and more a shining lush mass of curls. There were shelves of new hair products to explain the change. The aunties never did notice that Harry wasn't using contacts anymore. Both she and Hermione now had phenomenal vision, smell and hearing.

Harry and Hermione trained every day. They were especially concentrating on the mind disciplines required for Occulumenty and the animagus transformation. Harry had a head start due to Tai Chi which only motivated Hermione. Auntie Minerva thought that Harry might be ready to take the potion to see if she could be an animagus before school started back up, and Hermione before the holidays.

Neville invited both girls to his birthday party at Longbottom Manor. Harry's Aunts were determined on a dress, but Harry held out of a classic levis, tuxedo shirt and bolero jacket with her Fries. She looked readier for brunch in San Francisco than a pureblood birthday party, but she had at least avoided the dress.

Hermione met them for a portkey to the Longbottoms looking cute in a pretty pale green sundress. Harry had to explain all over again how it was fine for Hermione, she looked pretty, but Harry just wouldn't, so stop it.

Neville's party was a smash success. It seemed that their whole year from Hogwarts was there as well as quite a few older kids. The Weasley twins were there with Ron and their little sister Ginny. Ginny would be a first year in a few weeks and was all agog to finally be going to Hogwarts. The Slytherins were dragged along by

their elders. Madame Longbottom was head of a very prominent family.

The pures mostly stayed with the adults while the rest poured out into the grounds to make an enormous mess and have way too much fun.

Neville insisted on showing Ron, Harry and Hermione the greenhouse he had set up. Harry and Hermione peppered Neville with enough questions that Ron gave up and drifted away play in a pick up Quidditch game. Neville eventually wanted to know why they were so interested in his greenhouse and how to run one.

He jumped at the chance to help set up the huge production greenhouses that would be needed for the Wolfsbane potion. The ingredients were not that tricky to grow, there just wasn't a lot of demand so it tended to be pricey. Hermione figured they could work it all out for extra credit in herbology.

Ginny seemed like a really nice girl, very shy except around her brothers whom she terrorized. She had come with another girl about to start Hogwarts that fall, Luna Lovegood.

Luna was one of the strangest people Harry had ever met. She seemed to be only loosely connected with reality. Ginny said large gatherings were difficult for her and that her mum had died just a few years ago. Harry was moved to hug her and tell her that she, Harry, had lost her parents also though a long time ago. For just an instant Luna was present and sharp.

"Don't worry about Tommy, he says he's ok now." Harry felt a jolt through her and stumbled. She hugged Luna as hard as she could and whispered to her "Give him this for me." Luna nodded dreamily, a tear showed in her eye and she turned away humming. Ginny and Hermione looked floored. "Toledo Tommy was a street junkie in San Francisco. He died one night while we were waiting for the paramedics to come. I was holding him." Harry dashed angry tears away. "I hate drugs." Harry stared at Hermione. "We need to protect her, she is so close to the veil." Hermione nodded.

Harry and Hermione moved through the party always a bit apart. The story of their summer vacation would not have been believed by most of the kids. Still it was good to have Ginny and Luna to teach to

ski. They were both looking forward to school. Eventually the girls went to see what the grown ups were doing. Maybe they could get a line on how their efforts to crimp Voldemort's infrastructure were going.

They eased through the rooms under notice me not charms and silencing charms on their feet. Several of the company had taken on a goodly load of adult beverage and were feeling no pain. The girls were liberal with mild cheering charms, happy people talk more. Nothing useful.

They separated with Harry dropping the notice me not charm and moving into a room after giving Hermione a few minutes to prep the crowd. This method proved far more successful. "She almost killed the Malfoy boy in duel?" "Have you seen Malfoy? Yes, the other day, surprised he isn't here. I expect he fears he might not return from here." "What do you mean?" "Some of the old crowd can't be found." "Hush you fool!"

They thanked Neville for a great time and left for the farm.

There was a tremendous amount of work to be done setting up the werewolf village, greenhouses and surrounding farms. Neville was worth his weight in gold getting the greenhouses going and the first plantings underway.

Eventually Remus and the girls portkeyed to the Leaky Cauldron for the years shopping. They had to get new robes as they had both grown quite a lot. The next stop was for books for their new courses. They had chosen Arithmancy, Runes, and Care of Magical Creatures. It would make quite a load with their other activities, defense training and animagus training along with Occulumency training but it was what they wanted. A large stock of owl treats and they were ready. The next day the Express left from Kings Cross.

Chapter 5 Back to School

DISCLAIMER: I do not own anything JKR does. I make nothing from this. I appreciate being able to play with her world

Neville, Hermione, Luna, and Harry were all watching the entrance to Platform 9 3/4's. Luna won the pool when at 10:58 a torrent of redheads poured through. All up and down the train Weasley friends jumped down, grabbed trunks and pets and sprinted for the train. Slytherins hissed and booed as the Weasleys mobbed together for a final hug and were aboard just as the train started moving. Percy puffed his chest and looked for someone to lecture, the twins went in search of subversion, Ron and Ginny were dragooned into Hermione's compartment. Neville and Harry were just finishing the stowage of the Weasley trunks with an able assist from Luna. Luna was all smiles.

"Hello Ronald, Ginevra. Thank you for your timely arrival. I won the pool! Five galleons seventeen I made for your promptness!"

The others looked a bit guilty for wagering on how close the Weasleys would cut it. Ginny dove right in though.

"So happy to oblige Lady Luna, we Weasley's are nothing if not prompt"

Ginny swept into an elaborate curtsy.

"I'll not be Lady Lovegood until I am head of house Ginevra, but the courtesy is ever so appreciated."

The two fell onto one of the seats, a mass of giggles and tickles. Ron gave up trying to figure out how to get a cut of the bet and got out his chess set. Hermione had first go at him. She was sure that with her brains she would learn to beat him eventually. He still won every game but they were getting closer.

Soon Lavender, Pavarti, Seamus, and Dean were crammed into the compartment and the noise level was enough to get Percy to poke his head boy head in. When the lunch trolley came by Harry happily spent quite a bit on everything imaginable excluding chocolate frogs and distributed it all among them. Trevor had been watching Ron carefully, checking for any anti amphibian tendencies.

They talked amiably about the coming year, what classes would be like and started to handicap the odds for the House Cup. They were, of course, vastly in favor of Gryffindor winning the cup.

Ginny and Luna asked about the sorting, Harry took mercy and told them it was nothing difficult or painful, just a bit embarrassing. Shortly before the train was to pull into Hogsmeade Malfoy put his head into their compartment. "How sweet, all the cretins in one place. One good reductio and how much better off the world would be."

Luna's voice was high and clear.

"Arcturus wants you to make your own choices Draco."

Malfoy blanched and stumbled hurriedly from the compartment.

"Who is Arcturus Luna?"

Luna's brow arched

"I'm sure I don't know, he seemed to think it important I tell Draco though."

Ron was frantically busy trying to finish his summer assignments while he had the brain trust of the young lions in the car but his time and their patience with him was getting short.

There was a glorious pile up of children pushing for the carriages while Luna and Ginny went to Hagrid. Luna turned her unvarying regard on Hagrid and seemed very pleased with him, taking one of his giant fingers in her hand and holding tight. Her huge grin and unconditional affection was immediately returned and the three made plans for tea.

Hedwig and Athena arrived to ride to the castle with their mistresses and to give them the news they would need immediately. Minerva's campaign to update the muggle studies curriculum had been successful, there was a new muggle studies professor, a nice muggle born wizard.

They piled into the Great Hall and took their seats at the house tables. Nearly Headless Nick was seated next to Hermione and full

of the gossip of the summer. The girls and he chatted amiably about the doings of Peeves and the elves, the headmaster had managed a perfect score at ten pins - his lifetime best - which he followed with a horrific bout of firewhiskey consumption in the company of Hagrid. The Headmaster passed out while composing his resignation letter so that he could go on the professional bowling tour.

All of Gryffindor was roaring at Nick's story when Auntie Minerva called for silence and the Sorting Hat began the sorting song.

Luna's sorting took quite a long time, muttering grew as she seemed to be having a very animated discussion with the hat. Finally the hat spat out "Very well. If you insist, GRYFFINDOR". Luna drifted over to the lions on an wave of applause led by the second years. They had really enjoyed her company on the train ride.

The hat seemed quite grumpy for the next few sortings, barking out houses rapid fire after barely touching the heads of the students. Ginny was last to be sorted and was sent to Gryffindor quickly.

Harry and Hermione began Ron's table manners revision. He seemed to have backslid during the summer. He bargained for homework assistance and was threatened with shunning in return. He asked Neville, the court of last appeal, who wisely upheld the girls dictum. Chew, swallow, speak, all single separate actions and in that order. With eye rolling he began his retraining. The twins started to have a go at him but Ginny backed them off with a quick mutter that caused them to go pale. Harry resolved to discover that secret soonest.

The Headmaster gave the usual notices about magic in the corridors and the things that Mr. Filch didn't like. Quite quickly they were off to the tower and their beds. Harry and Hermione revised late into the night for the next days classes while Pavarti and Lavender planed their wardrobes. The girls were up early for their morning run and exercises. They ran around Black Lake and then did their tai chi forms, stretched out and meditated in the early sun, arriving in the Great Hall just in time for breakfast.

Harry and Hermione got Ginny and Luna headed towards their first classes and hustled off to their first lesson. Snape for double defense was intense and focused. He seemed nearly happy. He was apprenticed to the greatest alchemist in an thousand years, he

was teaching his next favorite subject, he was responsible for less of the petty student squabbles as he no longer was a head of house. He was still by no means a pleasant man, but he did seem to be healing in some way.

Harry shone in defense class. She hid her power level as best she could but her reaction speed and knowledge of spells was evident as well as her instinctive grasp of tactics. She had mastered all the second year spells by the end of her first year and was currently working on the late third year spells. Her plan was to be at OWL level by the end of the year. Hermione was pulled along in her draft, the Granger pride forcing her to work extremely hard to keep up with her friend.

Transfiguration, Charms and History were Hermione's to shine in. Harry had a deeply intuitive feeling for magic but Hermione's academic drive and attention to detail meant she would almost always get the better grades. On weekends Remus would meet the girls for advanced defense and mind magic lessons. The girls were deep in to the study of Occulumency.

Weekly tea at Hagrid's hut quickly grew to include most of the first and second year lions. They tramped down to his hut a noisy happy lot and were slobbered over by Fang with many an "Ewww". Hedwig and Athena rode the shoulders of their familiars like generals going to battle. The children quickly learned to have nothing to do with Hagrid's cooking. Even Ron gave up on the rock cakes. Hagrid told them tales about the parents he knew, giving Ginny and Ron some very precious blackmail material.

The group privately wondered why Hagrid had never finished Hogwarts. Harry imagined that it had to do with some horrendous beast. After all the Headmaster had caught him with a baby dragon last year. Charlie Weasley was able to take the dragon to the Romanian dragon reserve so all was well in the end, but still, a man who would try to raise a dragon in a wooden house? Hagrid was a bit different. He did make a brilliant friend and promised to try skiing with them that winter having heard from the headmaster on one of their bowling nights how much fun it was. It would take Dumbledore or Aunt Minerva to transfigure Hagrid skiing equipment, Harry and Hermione lacked the combination of finesse and power.

Luna and Ginny eased into the circle of friends around Ron, Neville and the girls with barely a ripple. The twins were always the center of commotion often with Percy trying to quell the riot. Fred and George were well liked, they would pull a joke on anyone but were as ready with a helping hand or a kind word. Their special targets were Filch, his cat Mrs. Norris, and with decreasing frequency Snape. Snape was a difficult and dangerous target to begin with and as he became "almost bleeding human!" in their words, they had less energy to direct his way. Besides the man was a genius at potions and potions were the base of many of their pranks.

Hermione was forcing Harry to study all her subjects not just Defense and Charms. When she was able to convince Harry that Transfiguration was a powerful adjunct to Defense Harry caught fire in that class as well. Harry found History of Magic very interesting under the instruction of Madam Flamel. She began a wide reading in the subject guided by Perenelle.

As Halloween approached Harry became uneasy over both Luna and Ginny. Her personal first years were not adapting well. Luna was pale and distraught most of the time while Ginny was oddly erratic - snappish and sneering one moment, scared, haunted, even terrified the next. Harry asked both of them to talk to her several times. Luna wouldn't say anything without Ginny's permission, and Ginny refused to say anything. Hermione and Harry were keeping as close an eye on the two as they could. Luna would say she was worried about Ginny, but all Ginny would say was she was fine and either leave or change the subject.

They were happily leaving the Halloween feast, a clump of young lions headed to their tower, groaning full of too much good food when they came to a bizarre sight. The odious Mrs. Norris, Mr. Filch's cat and familiar, was laying stiff in a large puddle of water. On the wall above her was scrawled a message.

ENEMIES OF THE HEIR BEWARE

THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS HAS BEEN OPENED

The message looked to be written in blood. Filch was in a screaming rage demanding punishment, both immediate and corporal. The rumor at breakfast the next morning was that the cat was petrified, not dead, as some had hoped. Mrs. Norris was Filch's able assistant

in patrolling the halls looking for wrong doers and couples out of bounds.

Malfoy was in a paroxysm of joy over the message and lording his pureblood status over the rest of the school as if he were just raised to a peerage. Harry offered to test if pureblood equaled combat superiority with Draco, he seemed to go temporarily deaf around Harry.

Hermione and Harry spotted Luna in an intense conversation with Ginny during the evening meal and were sneaking peeks looking for an opening to talk to them again, Ginny had looked horrid at breakfast, she didn't eat and it looked as if she hadn't slept in days. Hermione gasped and got to her feet, pulling Harry after her.

"Somethings wrong with Ginny and Luna, they just left the hall. Ginny looked very angry, come on!"

The two second years raced out of the hall after first years, only seconds behind. Harry managed to get her foot in the door of a deserted classroom just as it was about to close.

They eased into the room trying to look like they were just wandering in to have a word with friends. They smiled at the other girls and asked what was going on. Luna just stared at Ginny and Ginny looked at the floor.

Harry brought her magic up and focused it in her mind. She asked her magic to tell her what was wrong. Nothing happened at first, then Fawkes flamed into the room followed by Hedwig and Athena, the three had taken to roosting together. Fawkes landed on Ginny's shoulder singing softly to her, preening her hair.

Athena landed on Luna's shoulder, Hedwig came to rest on Harry giving a nibble on the ear. Hermione moved to Luna's side and smoothed a hand over Athena's brilliant feathers. The owls were gloriously vain.

"So Gin? What is it? Whats going on that Fawkes is here? Please Gin we only want to help you, if it's some kind of trouble we can help take the blame, just tell us."

Harry nodded at Hermione's words. Luna looked into Ginny's eyes.

"Now is the time to believe Ginevra."

Ginny's voice was low and hoarse.

"Diary Riddle"

Her voice was very raspy, her mouth slammed shut and her eyes went glassy, she trembled. Fawkes sang a peal of war and warning.

Harry saw it, just a flash of red in Ginny's eyes as her hand went for her wand. Harry's amped up reactions erupted, she drew and stunned so fast Ginny's wand was still mostly in her pocket. Ginny staggered back snarling. Her wand was clear and coming up towards Harry. Hermione let off a vastly overpowered stunner that threw the little girl across the room among a pile of desks.

"Auntie Poppy now Fawkes!"

The phoenix flashed away. Harry bolted to the little redhead checking pulse and airway. Poppy flashed in with Fawkes, pushed Harry aside and started scans. Hermione pocketed Ginny's wand, crying with the flushing adrenaline. Harry stood and hugged her.

"It's OK Mione, you did what you had to. She will be alright. Just relax, the worst is over now. Can you ask Athena to get the Headmaster?"

Hermione turned a wet eye to her familiar and Athena surged out of the door.

Soon the adults they had sent for arrived as well as a great many others.

There was a grand kerfuffle for a good amount of time. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley flooded to the school in quite a panic until they had made their way to Poppy who assured them that Ginevra was in no physical danger. She would likely require some aftercare, however the outlook was quite good for her.

The headmaster was examining the diary Auntie Minerva had found in Ginny's trunk. He cast several spells on the diary and recoiled at the results.

"Yes some very dark magic indeed."

He wrapped the diary in cloth and picked it up.

"Please all go to my office, floo call Mr. Malfoy in one hour and ask him to visit immediately, I shall return as quickly as I may. The password is Lemondrop. Nicholas, Severus if you would attend me please?"

The whole mass of them in pompous procession made their way to the Head's chambers. After an hour had passed Auntie Minerva called Mr. Malfoy to request his presence for an important meeting. He arrived quickly. He had an elf cleaning his boots as he arrived and made much ado about needing to be about his important business for the evening, not cooling his heels in the Headmasters office like a truant. The man was truly odious. He made the elf's job of cleaning his boots impossible by moving about, then cursed and kicked the little creature for not getting the task done.

They continued to wait quietly except for Lucius, who stood sneering near the fireplace, occasionally kicking at the elf. Hermione finally couldn't stand it.

"Mr. Malfoy why are you kicking that elf? Either ask him to stop or let him get on with it. You shouldn't kick him, he is just doing what you told him to."

Lucius gave Hermione a satisfied cold smile.

"He is doing as I told him. He is cleaning my boots. I choose to kick him as he is mine to kick."

Hermione looked at the elf.

"Whats your name?"

Hermione's voice was soft and kind. The elf looked at Lucius for permission to speak, he nodded.

"Dobby Miss."

"I am sorry your master is so foul Dobby, one of Harry's mothers is an elf, Limpy, I wish you could come live with me. He shouldn't treat you the way he does, the great asshole."

Dobby hopped aside as Lucius aimed a vicious kick at him.

"Avoiding punishment elf? I will see to you when we return to the manor. As for you little mudblood, take care, people who matter can break one you without a thought - like stepping on a twig."

He crunched one of Dobby's fingers under his heel.

"Just like that."

Harry shuddered at the pleasure in Malfoy's eyes, the gasp of pain from Dobby fueled revulsion for Malfoy.

"Actually sir, meeting you makes me appreciate what a nice young man your son is. Relatively speaking, he is a prince among men."

Hermione was gagging over the cruelty Malfoy exhibited. Harry struggled to stand and was forcibly held in her seat by Professor McGonagall.

"Stay still Harriet."

Harry burned to curse the man, no doubt just what he wanted. Harry's only question was how badly she could hurt him before she was stopped.

The Headmaster entered the office at that second of supreme tension as easily as a duck into water.

"Have I missed anything? No then? Well let us draw this matter to a close."

"Mr. Malfoy so kind of you to attend, if you would wait just a moment I shall have some documents for you to execute and your part in this affair will be over."

The Headmaster busied himself with a bit of furious writing and seemed very pleased with the results.

As he prepared to speak the door opened and Mr and Mrs Weasley entered with Aunt Poppy and Ginny. Ginny was pale but very determined. She stood in front of the Headmaster's desk back straight as a poker.

"Headmaster may I speak?"

"By all means Miss Weasley, I should be very interested in what you have to say."

"Dumbledore I did not come here to listen to the prattle of barn raised brats, if there is nothing of import to discuss here I will adjourn to the company of my equals."

Hermione didn't lower her voice a bit when she said.

"Lice convention in town Malfoy?"

Malfoy sneered at her and kicked Dobby again.

Ginny was determined to speak.

"I found a diary this summer after a visit to Diagon Alley for school supplies. I did not purchase the diary, it was in my cauldron when I returned from our shopping trip. I believe the diary was placed among my belongings by Mr. Malfoy during a struggle with my father in Flourish and Blotts."

Malfoy smirked not even bothering to deny the charge.

"The diary belonged to Tom Marvelo Riddle, a half blood student who attended Hogwarts about forty years ago. He would later be know as Lord Voldemort. I foolishly wrote in the diary and became ensnared by it. I was made to release the Monster of Slytherin and to paint the warning found."

"This diary Miss Weasley?"

Dumbledore dropped a singed and ruined book on his desk.

"I must admire the protective charms on it, FiendFyre was only just sufficient to overcome it's protection. As you can see Miss Weasley,

you are free of it now. It will do no further harm and may do some good."

This last the Headmaster said looking intently at Harry.

"Now then Lucius, to your part in the matter. To avoid questioning under Veritaserum concerning your involvement in the Death Eaters and your part in how this curious diary came into the hands of Miss Weasley you will resign from the Board of Governors of Hogwarts as well as from the Wizengamot effective immediately, for the rest of your life. Should you fail to sign these documents I, as magical guardian to the students of Hogwarts and as Head of House Dumbledore along with Arthur, as Head of Clan Weasley will swear blood feud this very minute on your direct line, that is to say on you, your lady wife and your son."

There was the sound of the door locking behind them. The fire went out. Dumbledore stared into the cold gray eyes of Malfoy.

"I feel very strongly about my students safety. Very strongly indeed. I should quite like to remove a threat to them this very moment."

Arthur Weasley was to the side of Malfoy with his wand drawn and pointed at the ground. Molly was on the other side and behind Malfoy. Sweat beaded the Malfoy brow.

"I will forgo such pleasure provided you sign these papers, they will constitute an unbreakable vow. Please read them carefully."

The Headmasters voice was even and pleasant. His eyes blazed and the power of his magic coiled around him like a storm.

Harry sat back and admired the great big brass set of balls the Headmaster had just shown. The only trick he missed was a pimp slap, and the game wasn't over yet. Lucius signed, wheeled around and stalked from the office with Dobby pattering at his heels. Harry ripped her school tie off and wrapped the diary in it. She chased after Malfoy.

"Mr. Malfoy, the Headmaster forgot something, please sir the Headmaster sent me after you with something, please wait up a moment!"

Malfoy paused and sneered at Harry as she slid to a stop before him and thrust the diary wrapped in her tie at him. Malfoy began to unwrap the diary, saw what it was and tossed it aside. Dobby caught it. Harry and Dobby grinned like lotto winners.

"I have no further use for that book, idiot, keep it as a memento of the worst day of your life - the day you made me your enemy!"

Harry grinned.

"I think I will keep it as a memento of the first day of Dobby's freedom. What do you think Dobby?"

Harry had made the mistake of taking his eyes from his adversary and would have paid dearly for it if Dobby hadn't been watching. Dobby snapped his fingers and blew Lucius into a wall 30 feet down the corridor.

"You will not harm Miss Harry, you are a bad man. You will go now."

Lucius Malfoy retired from Hogwarts that day no wiser and much less powerful. Dobby and Harry linked hands and started their way back to the Headmasters office.

"Miss Harry?"

"Yes Dobby?"

"Would you be looking for a house elf to work for you? I have high references. I work hard."

Harry shivered under the gentle brush of Fate's wing. She knew what to do.

"Yes Dobby I think that would be great. How do we do this?"

"You put your hand on my head and say you accept me into your house as your servant."

Harry stopped and looked at Dobby. She laid her hand on his head.

"I Harriet Pomfrey do accept Dobby into my family and my house as brother, friend, and equal. I do swear to care for and protect him so long as we both live."

Power erupted all around them, they stood in the eye of a magical storm.

Unaware of the roiling magic around them she turned and started to walk again.

"Will that work Dobby?"

She heard sniffing noises behind her.

"It is not usual Miss, it is a much more powerful binding, but it will work if this is what Miss wishes."

"Your wishes matter also Dobby."

Harry stopped and knelt in front of the little elf.

"Put your hand on my head and say how you accept me."

Dobby's little gnarled hand rested lightly in the lustrous raven tresses.

"Dobby does gladly accept Miss Harry as sister, friend, protector, both equal and Mistress. Dobby further swears to defend and protect Miss so long as we both live."

Harry enfolded the little elf in her embrace and rocked him quietly for a few minutes while the ocean of magic ripping around them settled back to stillness.

"Now my brother let's go see what trouble we have caused."

The two made their way down the corridor to the Heads office, hand in hand, chatting amiably like old friends.

They rejoined the group in Dumbledore's office to listen to many gasp and bemoan the trouble Malfoy would cause. Arthur was steadfast.

"Headmaster I must ask to borrow my children for the weekend, Clan Weasley will be meeting and I will require their presence."

Dumbledore's eyes shifted around the room, when he saw Harry and Dobby holding hands, Dobby with the broken diary he nodded with satisfaction.

"Poppy would you see to Dobby please? I am afraid he may have taken injury in his efforts for his former master."

"I should like to dismiss the students among us so that we may be sure they have no answers to any awkward questions they may be asked another day. There is a matter to attend to before you leave us. Miss Weasley I will have 50 points from Gryffindor for allowing yourself to become ensnared by a magical object of unknown purpose. Misses Lovegood, Pomfrey, and Granger 50 to each for steadfastness to friend, school, and indeed to all things magical. You may go children."

They ambled down the corridor exchanging the news of what went on in the Heads office while Harry was gone with the news of that happened with Harry, Dobby and Malfoy.

"So Hermione we have a brother now. Dobby and I adopted one another after Lucius dismissed him."

Dobby looked at Hermione. Clearly both were confused. Hermione grinned like sun after a thunderstorm, grabbed Dobby and hugged him hard.

"Dobby when Harry loves someone she adopts them. It's good to meet you brother, I have so many questions to ask you. Tell me, is there a house elf government?"

And she was off. Ron thought that anyone adopting a house elf into their family was just too strange for words. Harry snaked an arm around Luna's waist.

"How are you Luna? Did we do what we needed to today?"

Luna nodded slowly, her eyes focused more than was normal.

"Harry you shook the world again today, I should be used to it but you do find unexpected ways to fold magic on itself. We did all we could for the day. We must deal with Malfoy now, and the monster. There is still the monster."

So Harry asked again

"How are you Luna?"

She seemed confused by the question.

"I have told you all I can see Harry."

Harry nodded and gently pulled her to a stop.

"Luna are you happy?"

They held hands facing one another.

"I, well I.. I don't think I know. It has been so long since I was sure I was happy that it's a bit difficult to tell if that is what I am feeling now. I feel different than this morning. Lighter."

Harry's green eyes pierced Luna's silver gray orbs. Slowly, delicately she folded Luna into a soft gentle hug. In Luna's ear she whispered.

"She was deemed mad, holy to some, pure she was, dreadful with her sight, always was she lonely."

Harry pulled her magic to her and offered it to Luna to create a place of rest for herself.

Luna had felt so precarious, suspended over madness, awash in unceasing vision, hanging on by so little. Now she was in a broad open meadow, and there was a pool to look into if she cared to, or not. She relaxed into Harry.

"You don't know what you have given me today Harry."

Harry released her, ran a soft hand through her hair.

"Friends help friends, it's how you know them from the others."

They both smiled at the stupidity of the statement and moved to catch up their friends. Harry and Hermione were waiting for their Weasley friends on Monday. If Clan Weasley had sworn blood feud against Lucius and his line the political realities of the day could radically shift.

The red heads piled into the Great Hall early Monday for breakfast. They all wore blades. They all looked grim and determined. Malfoy was absent from Slytherin table and some said from the castle. Clan Weasley had met on Friday evening, declaring blood feud against Lucius and his line just before midnight.

With Bill leading a team of his brothers and cousins they had broken the wards on Malfoy Manor very early indeed on Saturday morning. They found the manor deserted. DMLE had emptied the manor of dark objects after being called in to investigate a catacomb entered from the parlor floor.

Lucius and his family were wanted for questioning concerning the remains of several human bodies found in cells, a large number of proscribed objects, and records directly linking him financially to Lord Voldemort. DMLE froze the known assets of Lucius. Amelia Bones took personal charge of a ledger listing bribes to the Fudge administration. She prepared to clean house.

Dung Fletcher had occasion to meet with Lucius late on Monday. Lucius was rumored to be short of ready funds and looking to sell some items. They sat deep in a corner booth of a bar where this kind of business was done. Dung brought his own drink to the table and kept his hand on it.

"You was looking for me Malfoy?"

Dung hoped Albus and Alastor had been able to set up outside. Malfoy nodded.

"I need to sell some things and I am told you can do so discretely."

Dung nodded agreement.

"Burgin and Borkes sir would be my recommendation. They will cheat you, but not as much as I will."

"I require a level of discretion that is not usual with them, they are closely watched by the ministry."

Dung smelt the blood in the water.

"Should be no problem with you sir, begging my saying so."

He all but tugged a forelock.

"Let us dispense with the foreplay and get right to the act shall we Fletcher?"

Lucius slid a medium sized box across the table.

"How much?"

Dung made no move to touch the box. Albus himself had fine tuned Dung's inherent skill at detecting traps, especially magical traps.

"Malfoy you are on your own. I don't touch things I don't understand and that box is one. You just leave here slow and easy and we all have a better day tomorrow."

Lucius looked around the room. There seemed to be a dozen hands close to weapons and a general interest in their area of the bar. Lucius was not seen on English soil for some months.

Dumbledore was philosophical about missing Malfoy. They had driven him from his web. With any luck they could emasculate him while he hid abroad.

The Weasleys took nothing from Malfoy manor. Not a plate, not a painting. The Malfoy properties were locked under bond to be awarded to the victor in their feud. If the Weasleys were to abandon their homes and flee the fight the same would happen to them.

The extended Malfoy family left Lucius to his own devices, they were originally from France and those who were left had no urge to go to another country to fight with a powerful clan known to have many friends.

Lucius left his wife and son with family in southern France and made his way to Albania, there was rumor that the Dark Lord's spirit was in that area. Lucius needed allies and a Champion, Lord Voldemort would serve admirably as both.

At Hogwarts the Headmaster was considering the problem of a monster loose somewhere in his school. He focused his prodigious talents on the problem and enlisted allies. Hagrid and Albus went to visit Aragog one evening after Albus had plied Hagrid with an enormous amount of firewhiskey and wheedled from him the secret of the spider he raised forty years ago.

Aragog refused to name the monster. Between Hagrid and Albus there wasn't a lot they didn't know about magical creatures and a fast game of twenty questions left them near enough to the answer that they could reach it with clearer heads. Albus promised an unwise number of cattle for a feast in thanks for Aragog's help and staggered to Hagrid's hut to have a kip.

Their tentative tapping on Snape's door for a hangover remedy the next morning was the subject of much laughter at the staff table during breakfast, from which they were notably absent.

Once the fumes of Firewhiskey had cleared the greatest wizard of the age deduced the answer almost as fast as Hermione. Slytherin, what would Salazar have as a servant? A snake of course. What snake could live a millennium, and was anathema to spiders? A basilisk.

Since the truth of the monster had to be kept secret it was known to the students before breakfast was over. The problem became how to locate the Chamber.

Hermione applied logic. The first victim of the Monster was Moaning Myrtle, the ghost who haunted the second floor girls loo. The second was Mrs. Norris who was found in a puddle of water on the second floor outside of Moaning Myrtle's loo. The most likely entrance? Harry always liked to have a firm grasp of the obvious.

"Myrtle's loo!"

The lot of them hurtled off to talk to Myrtle. She was tiresome although Luna seemed charmed by her. They asked if she might tell them how exactly she died.

"I was in this very stall having a cry over Olive Hornsby teasing me when I heard a sound, a boy making a noise. I opened the door to tell him he mustn't be here when I died!"

Hermione considered the story while the rest made placating ohhs and ahhs.

"Did you see anything when you opened your door Myrtle?"

"Oh yes, a huge yellow eye! And then I was DEAD!"

"Could you show us where the eye was Myrtle?"

"Well I am not sure exactly"

She sniffed, after all who is precise when in their death throes?

"But it was near there."

Myrtle was pointing at a section of sinks along the wall facing the stalls.

They asked Myrtle to have a drift through the wall to see what was behind the sinks, she found she couldn't get into the area behind one particular sink. Hermione prevailed as the clearer head and Auntie Minerva was called to the scene. Myrtle was very pleased indeed to receive an Award for Special Services to the school posthumously.

The Headmaster quickly had a crew of elves dismantling the sink. Behind was an enormous pipe, fully five feet in diameter. Minerva and Albus conjured a huge flock of roosters and put them under a compulsion to crow, then sent them down the pipe like paratroopers jumping from a plane. The sight and sound was so funny everyone present was helpless with laughter, even Myrtle laughed. She gave a surprised "Eeep" and passed over to the afterlife. She had a wonderful last day on Earth with her award and a good laugh, the laugh being the thing she had to accomplish to move on.

Soon all that could be heard was the occasional chuckle and the very distant crowing of roosters. The Headmaster set his hat firmly on his head, stepped to the edge, and dropped into the pipe. Hagrid followed. Confirmation came up from below that it was indeed a basilisk, a shed skin was found. A team of elves popped to the men below to excavate a tunnel around the doors to the chamber as Albus was unable to open them. Harry and company were livid at not being able to join the Headmaster but the adults stood firm, a retreat with children to guard would be impossible to do safely.

Once again pressed into service, the shock troopers of the light, fifty crowing roosters, stepped in file into the Chamber of Secrets. The monster of Slytherin was dead by the time the second chicken hit the floor.

Professor Flamel, the Headmaster, and Professor Snape all wrangled for the carcass to use in potions experimentation. The Board of Governors gave them enough to quiet them. The bulk of the monster was sold for potion ingredients. The hide was kept to make armor for the Auror's Corp. Some of the cash proceeds were used to remodel the Moaning Myrtle Memorial Ladies into the poshest loo in the school. A more normal entrance was built to the Chamber which was fitted with exercise equipment and became very popular as Salazar's Spa.

The memory recording of the only combat jump of the Hogwarts Rooster Paratroops was played before any major exam over the school wizarding wireless station and was always a huge favorite.

Harry was having a free period one afternoon and spending it with Aunt Poppy in the infirmary. She had one patient, a sixth year Ravenclaw who had broken a leg when he missed a step due to having his nose in a book. Harry tagged along while Aunt Poppy checked on him. She did a general diagnostic charm on him just to be sure he was in top shape before she released him.

Harry cast the same charm on Dobby, her constant companion.

"Auntie am I casting the charm correctly? I don't understand the results, they look odd." Poppy cast the charm on Dobby and studied the results, the decidedly odd results. It would be a while before they had a chance to begin research into the oddities of Dobby.

Harry was impatiently waiting for the snow to come, she ached to be back on her skis. November idled by with Hermione getting closer to beating Ron both at chess and for his table manners. Ron was rumored to have been spotted in the library flipping through chess books.

Harry continued an easy companionship with Ron and Neville. She liked the boys and spent a good bit of time with them in class and out. Neville always seemed a bit surprised that the rest of his year liked him and wanted him around.

Harry and Hermione were undoubtedly the leaders of their year. They usually had company for their training in the morning, the morning run around the lake, the tai chi after. As soon as Salazar's Spa opened they took up a cardio and strength training program. They wanted fast, sleek and strong. They let the boys go for bulk, it wasn't useful in combat, but dandy for lifting heavy things. Harry knew why she trained so hard, but Hermione's motivation was unclear to her. Was it just her competitive spirit? Hermione chased knowledge because that is what she did. She seemed to be as committed to the physical and combat training as Harry.

They had outlasted the rest of Gryffindors studying, Harry on some advanced defense and Hermione on some knotty problem in Transfiguration.

"Mione?"

"Hmm?"

"Why do you do it? The physical and combat training we do, it's intense, much more than anyone else. Why do you do it?"

Hermione looked oddly at Harry.

"I suppose because of the power ritual we went through. What do you remember about that Harry?"

"Umm cool presents?"

"She didn't talk to you, the Goddess?"

Harry shifted uncomfortably. Harry couldn't lie to Hermione, not like to a stranger or even another friend.

"She did, she talked to me about the inertia of choice."

Hermione said

"What an interesting concept. She told me that I had chosen a difficult path, that by being bonded with you I would be challenged as few have. She said that together we may win through, but apart we would certainly fail. She said half measures would avail us nothing."

They were quiet for a moment.

"It's down to us isn't it Harry? Voldemort?"

Harry looked at her palm, the palm with the crescent moon in a field of seven stars.

"You know I was adopted Mione. I know who my birth parents were. James and Lily Potter, Voldemort killed them Halloween night in 1981. I was born Harry James Potter." Hermione snorted

"I knew that since summer Harry. I'm not sure who all has figured it out, but it isn't that hard to do if someone really knows you. When you gave yourself that mature body? I was sure, before that I suspected."

"Not mad at me Mione?"

"Some, you can always trust me Harry."

Harry nodded.

"I wasn't to tell anyone I didn't both totally trust and I knew could block Voldemort out of their mind."

It was Hermione's turn to nod.

"So the inertia of choice Harry?"

"Oh lets say you find a pile of galleons. You sit and think what to do. Hide them and keep them or look for who may have lost them and give them back? The next time you meet that situation you will tend to respond to the it the same way you did the first. She was telling me that while I may view my gender as fluid, that fluidity was itself binding. I choose a flavor of female every day since I first changed. About Voldemort, yeah, he's down to me. There was a prophecy."

Hermione snorted.

"A prophecy. Right. And you believe it?"

Harry shrugged.

"Voldemort does. Dumbledore too. So I guess so."

Hermione thought about that.

"We need to research him. Find out how you beat him before. You were only 15 months old when you beat him."

"They told me it was my mothers sacrifice that protected me Mione."

Hermione paused. Harry had never talked like this before, about her birth parents. There was a level of trust that was new between them now. She was frightened to offend Harry and lose the new intimacy. Still Hermione was nothing if not rational and things didn't add up.

Softly Hermione spoke again.

"That doesn't make sense, I am sure other mothers tried to protect their children, gave their lives to protect them from Voldemort. What did your mum do differently?"

"So you don't think it was the amazingness of me?"

Hermione smiled at Harry.

"Maybe Harry, and maybe your mum too. She was a brilliant witch from what I've heard of her."

"Yeah, everyone compares the two of you. Smartest muggleborns ever."

"What did she do Harry, your mum?"

"I don't actually know, I have heard she was especially good at charms."

"Well sister mine, another thing we need to research. Your mum's career."

Harry nodded, not sure at all how she felt about it. For some reason she was close to tears.

"Do you ever think about changing back Harry? To a boy?"

Harry nodded.

"At least once a month, and any time I have to pee outside."

She bit her lip and looked aside. She couldn't look at Hermione.

"You know me Mione. We were blessed by the Goddess together. You have seen in my mind. But still... I don't know. I'm not sure what I am. I don't feel sure of what I am."

Harry closed her eyes tightly and concentrated. Hermione gasped as Harry reformed in front of her, reshaping into a tall lean muscled boy of their age. Face like a hawk, eyes piercing green, unruly lustrous black mop of hair. Harry's voice, but different, deeper. He was so handsome as to be nearly pretty. Mione felt her heart flutter, and warmth coursed in her veins, settling in her mid region.

"I can be this. It's possible. It's very tempting for what it makes possible, what it makes easy."

Harry's eyes held torment and something else, something Hermione couldn't name. She whispered

"Legimens"

Harry's mind was awash in emotion, love and fear and uncertainty boiled in him. Harry reformed again, becoming her familiar blood sister.

Hermione felt the shift as Harry changed back, felt how different and the same she was. "Could you do that for me?"

Harry nodded slowly.

"I think so. It would take a lot, I might not be able to change you back right away. It uses a lot of power to change someone else."

"I would like to try maybe over the summer. Whats the longest you've changed?"

"I never have before."

Hermione snorted again.

"Well I would think that is your answer right there Harry. If it were me, I would have tried before now. Are you afraid of being male?"

Harry nodded,

"It comes with baggage. The prophecy for a big one. And most men are asses."

"Dobby"

Hermione's call was soft, and the answer was immediate.

"Yes Miss?"

"Will you bring us all hot chocolate before we go up to bed? Harry will need you tonight, she's not feeling well."

Harry blinked away tears trying to look offended instead of grateful. They sipped the hot chocolate and watched the fire.

The silence between them grew long and more comfortable as it lengthened.

"So Mione are you ready for the animagus potion? We should both be able to take it now."

"I CAN'T BELIEVE I FORGOT!"

Harry laughed.

"I take it that's a yes?"

Dobby sat with Harry that night, holding her hand and softly humming a lullaby even after she fell asleep. His Miss was sore from the pale truths she had brought into the sunlight. Dobby would care for his sister.

"No worry for little Miss, Dobby will watch tonight."

Harry told Auntie Minerva the next day that she and Mione thought they were ready for the animagus potion. McGonagall agreed and set a time on the coming Saturday for them to take the potion.

The girls struggled to stay focused in their classes during the rest of the week. Harry being a bit spacey was not that unusual, but Hermione being less than razor sharp in class was cause for notice. Predictably it was Neville who asked what had them so concerned. With secrecy vows particular to those in their early teens they told Neville that they would be attempting to find their form that weekend.

Neville was beyond jealous. He pleaded for help in becoming an animagi also. Soon their whole group was badgering the girls to be trained towards becoming animagi. Harry and Hermione set everyone up with the mind exercises they had done for years to get to this point. Ron was well ahead of the others due to his Tai Chi devotion. The others were not starting from zero as they had all participated at least a little in the meditation at the end of the mornings exercise routine.

Ginny was still flummoxed that her brother would get out of bed early to work out without suitable application of high explosives. She and Luna had joined the exercise group from the first week at Hogwarts. They seemed to enjoy it once the initial shock was over. It was very difficult to meditate when Luna decided to lead them in guided meditation. Her idea of soft flowing poetic imagery was so full of things either impossible or outrageous that the others would usually end up staring at her goggle eyed and grinning.

After a nervous breakfast Saturday morning the girls made their way to Auntie Minerva's quarters. Poppy was there with the potion. The girls insisted that they take the potion at the same time. The

slammed the foul concoction back, joined hands and lay back on a blanket spread on the floor.

Harry drifted in darkness for a long time. She was comfortable, at ease, mildly aware of Hermione's hand in hers. Slowly she sank into the soft black. There was a bit of sunlight before her, like a window in a cellar. She moved towards it, gliding, ghostlike. She stalked into the sunlight sniffing for information, ears twitching to catch any sound. She was in a dense forest, steeply sloped. Her balance was sure. She moved easily into the shadows of the trees, ahead was the scent and sound of water. A drink would be good. In a small pool she caught her reflection, a cat, a large cat, tufted ears, emerald eyes, with a blaze of lightning over her left eye. She was black spotted, white underbelly. Her human mind knew she was much larger than a house cat, but smaller than the great cats. The vision blurred and faded. She was wrapped in the soft black again, drifting towards the light above.

Hermione stilled her heart as she drifted into the darkness. Nothing bad could happen to her, Harry held her hand and she was in a room with the Aunties. Slowly she relaxed into the experience, let herself find the light, let herself look through her dream eyes. She was perched far up in a tree, the tree on a mountainside. Below her a large cat meandered to a stream for a drink. She watched silently as the cat drank and paused at it's own reflection. The cat turned and faded into the shadows. Hermione launched and flapped a few times, caught a thermal and rose with it, wings rocking instinctively for maximum benefit. She was queen of the sky, undisputed apex predator, and an object of reverence for primitive peoples. She was a golden eagle, one of the largest of her kind, able with a bit of luck to take down a deer. She kind had been used to hunt wolves. Her human mind reveled in the power and freedom of her flight. She curled her wings in and dove screaming for the joy of it. She dove into the soft black and slowly rose to the mundane daylight before her.

The girls were stirring. Poppy ran diagnostic scans as a matter of course. There was little that could go wrong with the potion induced trance, but this was Harry they were talking about. The girls stirred and stretched, sitting up easily.

Poppy required a status report.

"How do you feel my dears?"

"A bit muzzy actually, it was brilliant though, how about you Mione?"

"Yes I'm a bit adrift. What were you Harry? I think I saw you, some kind of large cat weren't you?"

"Yes, not a really big one, like a lion or anything, more between house cat and lion, about two feet tall at the shoulder I think. Black spots, white underside, tan coat. I loved it. How about you Mione?"

"I was a golden eagle. Flight was amazing. They are quite cocky, think themselves lords of creation. I think I will have to give brooms another go."

"AN EAGLE! Wicked!"

Minerva and Poppy let them chatter on releasing some of the pent up emotion of the experience.

"If I may interrupt ladies, your next step is to begin to transform into your shape. This is a long process, perhaps as long as learning your shape. You hold your form in your mind and attempt to transform a portion of your self into your form. There is no incantation or wand needed, only mental focus. Do you understand?"

They nodded and closed their eyes. Almost instantly a Eurasian lynx stood before them, green eyed with a white lightning bolt blaze on his forehead.

Minerva dropped her tea cup.

"Sweet Merlin! I should have expected that I suppose given your other transformations Harry."

They gathered around Harry petting him and skritchng behind his ears. He was large for his kind, over two feet tall and four foot long. His purr was a buzzing rumble.

"Change back now Harry dear, I can assist if you require help."

It was a few minutes before Harry reformed panting and sweating before them.

"He didn't want to go."

"I am not surprised dear. It is one of the harder challenges of being an animagus, caging your other self."

Harry turned to Hermione.

"I think I can help you make the change Mione, if you would like me to?"

Hermione was truly torn. If she let Harry help her she wouldn't be learning herself, but if Harry helped her she would be flying that very day.

"Yes please Harry."

"Begin to concentrate on your form Hermione. Let us see what this wild talent of Harry's can do in your aide."

Poppy shifted nervously, she hated to see her loved ones messing about with their bodies.

Hermione stilled, her eyes closed. Harry reached for her, a hand on either side of her face, thumbs gently tracing her cheekbones, eyes soft with an emotion she usually hid.

Minerva looked on then glanced at Poppy who nodded back. It was as they had thought. More than best friends and blood sisters, at least in Harry's mind. Her Aunties prayed that the awkward halting courtship playing out subliminally before them cause as little pain as possible to their girls.

Suddenly Harry was sitting back regarding an enormous bird, golden brown feathers, a fierce and piercing eye. She was regal, of that there was no doubt. Slowly, so as to not frighten the avian instincts Hermione was just finding, Harry reached forward and stroked her feathers.

"So beautiful. Mione your awesome!"

The aunts could only agree. Hermione opened her wings to their full seven foot stretch and gave a little pop of a stroke, lifting herself

onto the table. She didn't like being below anything with teeth. She preened as her humans praised her. It was only her due.

On the floor before her another of her kind appeared, of a size with her, green eyed with a white blaze above the eye.

Eagles don't usually laugh but this pair did as the Aunties sat carefully. Poppy was the first.

"I might have known. We need to name that talent of your Harry. Can you change back now? The both of you?"

Harry reformed before them, Hermione a bit after. They grinned at one another.

"Mione I think we have a date with some updrafts this afternoon, what do you think?"

"I think that you can show me how to be a lynx Harry. Care to try?"

Minerva and Poppy were both talking at once about how bad an idea that was when Harry took Mione's head into her hands again and changed her to a lynx.

It turns out that it is not only Cheshire cats that can grin. Mione stretched and dug her claws into the table under her. The level of noise from the Aunties was approaching that which would damage hearing. Mione let out a screeching yowl ending all discussion of the foolishness of certain young witches, and their rapidly approaching punishment.

"Can you change yourself back Mione?"

Hermione formed sprawled across the table wearing a huge grin.

"Excellent Harry! Two forms! If the rest of the gang can get their forms we should be able to have our own zoo in our heads!"

Poppy and Minerva left earth orbit at that point well on their way to going nova.

The girls didn't even mind the detentions they were going to serve, those were for the next day. Today they would fly, and stalk. They

promised all manner of carefulness as they escaped the Aunties. Once out of sight of the school and well into the edge of the Forbidden Forest they changed to their lynx forms and raced into the woods. Tag and wrestling were important, as well as rabbit chasing. They roared into a clearing at top speed, dizzy with the power and grace of their forms. Harry changed back to human and took Mione's head in her hands again. Harry sent her magic to the lynx before her to sharpen her reactions and her senses, make her stronger, and increase her size to match Harry's in Harry's lynx form. Mione shifted directly to her eagle form and Harry ran the firmware upgrades again. Harry shifted to her eagle and the two took to the skies.

It was nearly a religious experience, to fly with each other. Wingtip to wingtip they soared over the mountains behind Hogwarts, riding thermals, wheeling and diving. They flew until sunset ending their flight on top of the Astronomy tower. Once shifted back to their human selves. They joined hands and walked slowly to the Great Hall for dinner. They were famished. The next day they would find that their flying had used muscles well beyond the point of pain. They no longer had to train upper body, flight took care of that. It became a daily ritual for them to steal at least a bit of time for a flight and a run in the woods. The clear clean minds of the predators took a lot of stress off the girls, and the sheer joy of the physicality of their forms added a lot to their day.

Finally, finally, finally the snow got deep enough that an optimist could say that skiing was vaguely possible and girls grabbed their rock skis and their friends and headed into the mountains for the first day of skiing. A fortnight later they skipped classes for the whole day following a 4 day blizzard that had dumped over 3 feet of snow on Hogwarts and who knew how much in the back country. They returned barely awake, red and cold, ravenous and ecstatic.

Dobby and Limpy had provided lift services until the girls transfigured them some equipment and insisted they at least try it. Soon the four of them were streaking down the mountains, shrieking with joy and exhilaration. There are few greater things than cutting class for new snow. Professor Snape assigned them both detentions to be served with Hagrid that Saturday.

Hagrid was revising for his OWL's and NEWTS after having his name cleared with the discovery of Slytherin's monster and the real

culprit behind the unleashing of the basilisk both fifty years ago and just this year. He had gone to see Mr. Ollivander and had a new wand although he kept his pink brolly close to him.

"It's familiar like to me, I guess I'm just used to it."

He planned to sit for his OWL and NEWTS in June and his Masters in Care of Magical Creatures perhaps the year after. Their detention for the day was to map the winter habitat of the Acromantula colony. He supposed that since they were cold blooded they hibernated although no one knew for sure. Not many would dare to go look. Harry and Hermione made sure their armor and sabers were ready, just in case.

The first bit was a slog, even with Hagrid to break trail but once they were deeper into the cover of the trees the snow depth was less and travel was easier. They quite quickly found the colony. It was beautiful in a very scary way, the snow on the giant webs, and the dark eye of the cave the spiders seemed to have retreated to. Even Hagrid didn't care to go into that cave without an invitation, so after making some drawings and usage graphs, taking photos and snow samples they headed back.

They had just begun the trek back when Fang, Hagrid's boarhound, cut a scent and took off on its trail with a bellow. Fang was a notorious coward and had never acted interested in hunting before so Hagrid was more than a little puzzled. He roared for his hound and slogged in pursuit. The girls churned after him quickly becoming very warm indeed in their winter gear moving at a jog.

Hagrid was able to keep in hearing of Fang and the girls could just hear Hagrid's ever more occasional yell for the "DOZY MUTT!" It had been late afternoon when they had left the spiders, and now it was twilight, with a moon rise. As the dusk deepened into full night the girls caught up to Hagrid who was giving Fang a very strict dressing down. Hagrid questioned his parentage, his morals, and especially his common sense to go haring off after Merlin knew what! Fang seemed singularly unimpressed. He actually was whining to continue the trail. They stood for a minute to cool off after the mad dash through the snow and took in their surroundings.

They were in the middle of an open area, nearly circular and bowl like, cupped, surrounded by old growth trees, trees of vast size, so

large even Hagrid couldn't put his arms around one. They weren't of any particular species, but a mix of deciduous and evergreens. Beech and oak, pine and fir, poplar and even cherry.

It was a quiet place and felt deeply magical. There was a single set of tracks cutting across it and disappearing into the gloom of the other side. Drawn, they all crossed the glade and stood looking into the dark under the huge trees along the dim trail.

Fangs ears came up and he whined a little, sniffing sharply. Just at the edge of sight was a flicker that looked like fire. It teased at their vision and each wondered if it was their imagination.

"Hagrid?"

Harry's husky voice whispered into the crisp air.

"Do you see a fire?"

Hermione hissed softly in agreement and Hagrid nodded. They moved forward to the light. Deep under the trees sat a small stone cottage, a wisp of smoke trickling from the chimney and firelight flickering in the windows.

"Have we left the Forbidden Forest then Hagrid?"

Hermione didn't think there were any buildings in the forest.

"We didn't go far nearly long enough to leave the forest Hermione. I didn't know there was a house hereabouts. In fact I don't remember ever seeing this glen. It's not a place I would forget."

The girls nodded agreement.

"Shall we go and knock then Hagrid? It doesn't seem like a bad place."

"No it doesn't seem bad, but we had best be careful ladies. Stay behind me and Fang."

The little troupe marched to the door and Hagrid knocked softly.

A moment passed, and another, then a soft step was heard and the door opened. Before them stood a being of ethereal beauty. Not tall, but slender and giving an impression of great power, as if the ground would shake should she stamp her foot. Human like, but with longer pointed ears, and larger almond shaped eyes. Her hair was pure shining silver and lush, falling in gentle waves. It was impossible to tell her age, but she seemed ancient, much much older than Dumbledore or even the Flamels. It came naturally to them to bow before her. They weren't forced to but her presence required that gesture of respect. She seemed desperately out of place, as if she should be in a palace of crystal and silver.

As they straightened from their bows she spoke to them in a voice such as Fawkes would use if he used words.

"What brings thee to my door at the beginning of the longest night?"

Hedwig and Athena swooped under the trees and settled onto their mistresses shoulders as if it had all been planned. Fawkes flamed into being and circled the glade once singing, then landed on the shoulder of the silver lady.

The phoenix looked at the silver lady and sang for some minutes. She laughed full out, a living full bodied laugh. She looked to be of ice but she was of fire, and earth, and warm.

"And so what has been said is not the half of it. Please join me for a while, you have an ambassador without peer in my friend Fawkes."

She stepped back from her doorway and they entered.

Hagrid shrank or the door got larger but he fit through a perfectly Hagrid sized opening. To each it seemed a place of perfect proportion, homey and clean. She led them down a hallway to an open sitting area with a large thick mat for Fang to lay on and bite the snow from between his pads. There was a massive rocker for Hagrid and deep wingback chairs for the Lady and the girls. The Lady sat and asked them.

"What are your names and how did you come to be here this evening?"

Hagrid went first, being the adult

"Rebus Hagrid ma'am, Keeper of the Keys and Grounds, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry."

Hagrid felt it was a formal occasion. The Lady nodded and looked at Hermione.

"Hermione Granger ma'am, I'm a student at the school. We were studying the habitat of the Acromantula in winter ma'am. Hagrid will be taking his Mastery in Care of Magical Creatures we hope. Fang found a trail and followed it, we followed Fang and all of us ended at your door ma'am."

Hermione fell silent blushing. She felt she had said enough and several times more than enough. The Lady stared at Athena for moments, each silent and unmoving. Both nodded and the Lady turned to Harry.

"And you changeling? What of you?"

Harry started back in her chair.

"It seems, my Lady, that you already know of me, yet I know nothing of you, who are you ma'am?"

"The world had aged beyond knowledge of my true kind child. When I was young your school was not even a dream. Before the Hanging Gardens were made my kind lived on this land. Now we are changed beyond recognition, we were shaped and are held by an old war and an old peace. Our power was broken, other powers rose and fell and other kingdoms rose to fall in their turn. But the oath of our peace has held these long centuries. My people are still bound to the service of yours. My name like my foremother before me is Arawen."

"Elves"

Harry's husky whisper barely stirred the air.

"You are an unbound elf."

Her voice was stronger now.

"Tell me how to undo the binding! I knew something was wrong with Dobby!"

"My doom is that only on this night may I visit this plane. My peoples doom is that only on this night may the one to end the binding be found. Many have made their way here. Some have gone on to attempt the ending. None have succeeded."

Hermione stood and walked to Harry's chair, pulling her to her feet. They stood before the Lady, hands clasped.

"We will attempt to end the binding my Lady, on our lives, on our magic, on our honor so mote it be!"

With a gesture they wore their golden armor and held their staffs. They knelt before the Lady. She rose and drew a sword, the Flame of the West, and tapped them each on their shoulders.

"Rise then and let us talk of old things and where they may be in this old world."

They were never able to recall precisely the rest of that evening and night.

Elves had become servants of men, bound to household service by an ancient magic sworn to end an ancient war. The oath had been sworn and the magic bound into a gem set in the crown of a king before the pharaohs rose. No one other than Arawen even remembered the place where the war was fought. She told them that the gem was pure black with a white star in the center that gave an actual light. It was large, about the size and shape of an egg.

It had been found and lost and found again many times but never unmade. She did not know how to unmake it. The tale had come to her from her foremothers that her people had been tricked in making the peace. Arawen was told that the binding was made with the blood of the elven warriors of the day who had lost their struggle against an evil human king, and would only be unmade with the blood of victorious warriors against the same enemy. Their enemy had died undefeated all those thousands of years ago leaving the elves bound. Death had sealed them in their servitude. Arawen had spoken at length with the centaurs. She was sure that the binding could be broken, that eventually it would be, that somehow the king

would return to be defeated by elven warriors and that their blood could be used for the unbinding.

As the night ended and the sky came light she led them to the glade. They gathered in the center of the clearing to meet the first dawn of the lengthening days. The half giant and the goddess blessed sisters renewed their vow to end the binding. They would meet again in a years time.

Disclaimer: JKR is kind enough to let me play in her world, which I greatly appreciate. I own nothing.

Hagrid and the girls made their way to Hogwarts, the early winter dawn around them. "Yea two beat all for meeting people yea neer should be near." Hermione was offended. "We were following you! And you were chasing this brainless git!" She ruffled Fang's ears.

"Besides it will be so interesting to research that gem. I can't wait to ask Professor Flamel about it in History. I would think she has heard about it if it has been lost and found so many times. Have you heard of it Hagrid?" He shook his head no. "Neer have Hermione, she was a grand lady wan't she? Gives me a bit to look forward to for next year, to meet her again."

Harry took a turn at Hagrid. "What do you know about elves Hagrid? Are there other elves than house elves?" "I know a bit yeah, house elves have their own magic, strong magic. Seems to be stronger the more they care for their family. People used to say the house elves were bound to the house, but the building means nought to them. Wizards keep their distance from the elves if you get my meaning. Not caring too much about them. They get wild and unpredictable if they get too close."

Harry was looking a bit miffed. She couldn't be closer to Limpy and Dobby. They certainly weren't wild and unpredictable. Unless you wanted a servant. The Pomfrey elves were much more family than servant and acted it. It had just happened that way. Limpy had been Harry's constant companion and guardian for years. Then Harry adopted Dobby by magical oath under the influence of Merlin only knew what power. She refocused on Hagrid's recitation.

"Old books talk about wood elves, but no one has seen one in centuries. Harry your as close as anyone I've seen to house elves. What you and Dobby did, well it isn't done. Not that you doing whats never done is news. Your a right terror at wizard traditions Harry."

Hermione snickered and poked Harry. Harry scooped up some snow and soon the two of them were embroiled in a snow fight. Fang seemed to think his assistance was required, and the four of them were shouting, barking and rolling about for a good few minutes. Hagrid was great fun but you had to move sharpish if it looked like he was headed to where you were. He had a lot of mass behind him.

They came out of the forest in the early morning of a Sunday. They wouldn't have to worry about getting the sleep they needed so badly following a long walk in the winter woods and the strange time with Arawen. If the girls could just slip through the net of Harry's aunties eagle eyes, they could be in their toasty beds after a good breakfast.

The whole adventure was explainable, but how acceptable their head of house found the explanation would be the acid test. Hagrid said he would have a word with Harry's aunts if they needed him to. "It might be better if they don't have to ask though right ladies?" Fervent nodding answered him. A conspiracy of silence was the best they could hope for.

They slid through the halls and eased into the common room unnoticed. A fast shower and they headed off for breakfast. Both of them had their fingers tightly crossed that they hadn't been missed last night. Bold faced and casual they sauntered into the Great Hall in search of calories.

Neither of the aunts was present which was a blessing. The Gryffindor table was sparsely populated, but it was early on Sunday. They heaped their plates and dug in, slowly relaxing as their presence didn't seem to cause any waves. Maybe for once the Aunts would miss a trick. It had to happen some time after all.

Ginny and Luna ambled in and made a beeline for them. "And where were you two last night?" Ginny starting with a good offense. "Detention with Hagrid. Keep it down we would rather not have to explain here." "Alright then, for now. Full report at eleven?" Hermione nodded. "First a nap then the library, the usual table." Ginny recoiled in shock. "Hermione you are actually going to have a kip rather than go to the library? I don't believe it. Its the second coming. It's the end times." Hermione just glared. "That is so not funny Ginny."

Harry avoided snorting everyone with her hot chocolate by main willpower. The hall was filling as the girls made their exit. The beds were soft and warm as they pulled the covers over their heads. Lavander and Pavarti were arguing over the mirror. Their hearts weren't really in it, and it wasn't long before the girls tuned them out and slept.

Hermione and Harry poured themselves into their research. They didn't have a lot of time between their classes, their combat training, and an occasional skiing foray but what they had they tried to maximize. Hermione had divvied up the tasks. Harry had to research her mums career and Voldemort's continued survival. Hermione was on elves and the mysterious gem.

The Grangers joined Harry's family for a Christmas in Scotland. They booked into a nice bed and breakfast in Hogsmeade. Christmas was wonderful, the families had their private time with breakfast and presents then joined up for more food and more presents. The floo at The Farm roared frequently as the Weasleys, the Longbottoms, the Lovegoods and various staff from school stopped by to have a bite and exchange gifts.

Arthur Weasley was fascinated by The Farm with it's mixture of magical and muggle technology. The Aunties had to attend Christmas dinner at Hogwarts so Molly and Arthur stood in loco parentis for the duration. It wasn't long before the girls had him talked into trying skiing with them over the holiday. Harry made an appointment to talk to Xeno Lovegood later in the holiday. Xeno was a news man and held a wealth of detail concerning The Dark Lord's rise and fall.

The company had the distinct pleasure of watching Madam Augusta Longbottom and Neville annihilate the Weasley twins in an exploding snap tournament. The twins were left with shocked expressions and four hairs between them.

Limpy and Dobby were in constant motion with drinks and food. Hagrid had walked over after a lunch at the Three Broomsticks. He was in a cheery mood from the attentions of Madam Rosmerta and her mead. She did love to flirt with him. Remus came over from his village where he had been busy with the celebration of the holiday. It was a difficult time for the lycans, many of whom had lost family and community to their affliction.

In short order a caroling group was formed and the whole mass of them trekked to the lycan village with a huge bowl of eggnog and began caroling in the village square. They were joined by the villagers in ones and twos, before long most of the inhabitants were there and singing. Madam Longbottom was controlling herself with difficulty but did manage. She watched proudly as Neville was

hauled away for a much needed consultation concerning the greenhouses. It was the best Christmas Harry had ever had.

For the rest of the holiday the Grangers would walk over to The Farm after they had breakfast to meet with Harry, Limpy and Dobby for skiing. The floo would roar and various Weasleys would tumble out. Luna and Neville decided to give it a try having heard how fun it was. The Headmaster could sidealong Hagrid to the top of the slopes, and Mr. Weasley could of course apperate himself and another. That still left Limpy and Dobby in constant motion, moving skiers up the hill.

Harry grabbed a panting Dobby. "I needs to take Miss Ginny up Miss Harry, just a second." "Dobby, show me how to pop, I'll help move people, you aren't getting to ski, it's not fair." "You is knowing how to read minds Miss Harry?" "A bit Dobby, yeah." "Do that while I pops you up the hill, then you can feel what needs to be done."

"Legimens" Harry whispered. Dobby's mind was beautiful, radiant, full of the joy of the people around him. He took hold of Harry and concentrated on his next step. He asked his magic to make his next step end on top of the hill. Harry withdrew and hugged Dobby. "You are so wonderful my brother, happy Christmas to you!" Dobby hugged fiercely back. Dobby snapped his fingers and was in his skis and boots, his boots were different from one another just way he preferred his socks. He made it work somehow. They raced down the slope whooping and gasping with the effort.

It took Harry three more examples, reading Dobby's thoughts and feeling his magic as well as several tries but inside an hour she was popping skiers to the top. Hermione was not about to have Harry know something she didn't so every other run Harry would pop her to the top while she watched Harry's mind.

The Headmaster observed the girls learn something no wizard had ever learned. He knew that popping was only possible for house elves. After another of his kamikaze runs down the slope he asked Harry to teach him popping.

Harry was an intensely private person and didn't at all like the idea of the Headmaster in her head. He had asked so politely though, and it would be rude to refuse him. She raised her Occulumenty shields and brought forward the popping thoughts, putting them

outside the shields. "Well then, right then sir, you have to be in my mind and watch how I step to the top." Albus nodded gravely and cast "Legimens".

He found himself before a fortress facing a perfect avatar of Harry. Harry nodded cheerfully and grabbed his hand matching her actions in the physical world. "Now what you do is make your magic put the end of your next step where you want to go. You just walk, and the magic moves the world so your next step is your destination." Albus concentrated on the mental process. He had a disorienting burst of power, just a touch of power, like a spark flaring. They were at the top of the hill.

"Did you get it sir?" Albus was glad of the support of his ski poles, otherwise he would have fallen. "I am afraid I did not Harry, most interesting. I am sure that this is not something I am able to do. Let us descend and I will apperate us to the top. Perhaps we can give you a method of travel twice in a day." They had popped to the top of a long slope, it was a sharp drop for the first few hundred meters, then an open glade with moderate slope, perfect for high speed long open turns, heady and relaxing.

By the end of the day Harry and Hermione were both popping and apperating. They much preferred popping, it was a lot more comfortable. Everyone pitched in to cook the evening meal as the elves were knackered from skiing and popping all day as well as providing lunch.

All too soon the holidays were over and school was back in session. Dobby and Limpy slept quite a bit for the first week, they had worked themselves into a frazzle with all the cooking and popping and skiing.

Hermione made a request of the Headmaster. He was happy to assign house elves to the ski club. Hermione made sure that the elves had the chance to ski and that the students did their share of the labor for the lunches and other tasks. The Headmaster had to deal with the Ministry about the growing evidence of back country skiing around Hogwarts. The Ministry was concerned that the Muggles would catch wind of the growing popularity and there would be a secrecy leak.

As with all good things the snow season ended and the boring muddy rains of spring took over. Hermione's concentration was fierce as the end of the term approached. Again the second years marched to her revision schedule. She had the first years well in hand with Luna and Ginny leading their study sessions.

The long hours in the library gave Harry liberty to pursue what was known about Voldemort's survival and his mother's career. She ignored the Daily Prophet as a source. The actual events of that Halloween were in many books. There were no theories as to exactly how Voldemort had survived. The most prevalent story was that there was something unique in Harry, Lily, or both that allowed Harry to survive and to kill Voldemort. Hogwash in Harry's opinion. There was a distinct lack of speculation as to Voldemort's fate. The common assumption was that he was dead. That assumption held to the present day despite the eyewitness evidence of the Headmaster that Professor Quirrell was possessed by the Dark Lord's spirit and despite the badly deformed body of that deceased DADA teacher.

The only printed information Harry could find about Lily's career was that she worked for the Ministry. James had been an Auror along with his best friend Sirius. Remus had gone on for his Mastery in Defense after Hogwarts as the Ministry wouldn't hire a lycan. Peter was also employed at the Ministry in a clerical position.

Harry wandered into the lycan village one Saturday looking for Remus. They were to meet later in the day for combat class, but Harry wanted privacy for this talk about her mother. Remus was helping one of the lycans put up an addition to his house. The villager and his wife were expecting a baby and the village was abuzz with the news. Harry pitched in helping how she could until the lesson time came around. They excused themselves and headed to the Farm. The weather was nice, an early spring day, leaves just budding out, grass just greening up nicely. "Remus what did my mother do after Hogwarts?" They walked in silence for a few paces. "What brings this up cub?"

"I am trying to understand what happened that night. How Voldemort and I survived a killing curse. I'm sure other mothers died for their children, and as awesome as I am, I'm sure I am not all that awesome. So what do you think? Was it not a killing curse? Or was

it something my mother did? What did Voldemort do that he survived if it was an AK that hit him?"

They walked a few more paces. "Remus?" "Thinking cub, give me a minute." Harry nodded. "How is your Occulumentcy Harry?" "I need the Headmaster to tell me, I think it's fairly strong. Hermione as well. We are about even." Remus nodded "Let us see if we three can have a chat with the Headmaster this afternoon. The answers to your questions should be held safe from all prying eyes and wands Harry." Harry understood that to include her DADA instructor, the ever odious Snape.

Remus made a quick fire call when they arrived at The Farm. They flooded to Hogwarts Headmaster's office joining Albus. Hermione popped in on the arm of Dobby.

Albus was seated at his massive desk, behind a massive pile of paperwork, quill in hand. He smiled at them, offering lemon drops around. His skiing tan was fading but he looked as spry as ever. The exercise had been good for him, he had been moving about the school with good deal more energy.

The girls accepted the lemon drops and headed for Fawkes who they missed quite a lot. It was difficult for even Remus with his upgraded lycan hearing to say who was cooing to whom between the three of them. Soon enough Albus set his quill down and asked the girls to be seated.

"I will be testing your Occulumency shields today. I will use as much power as I have so long as your shields hold. Should you be able to withstand my full ability we may begin to have those discussions you have been so eager for, and I so reluctant." The girls were caught somewhere between grins and glowers.

He drew his wand and stared directly into Harry's eyes. "Legimens" it was a whisper. Like that whisper Harry felt just a tingle of a presence, sniffing, searching for a hole, a crack, a bit of weakness. She reminded herself that the first rule was don't panic, the second rule that a towel was the most massively useful thing in the universe, and finally that the answer was 42.

The whisper of a presence became a strong pressure and built many times from strength to strength. She refused to let the answers

change. No panic, a towel, 42. At the peak of the pressure she could think nothing else. She was not aware of a strain or of effort, only of her answers. Finally the pressure stopped and she was alone in her mind.

"Most impressive. Most unusual. Would you tell me please why a towel and the number 42? The don't panic I understand." Hermione looked at her blood sister as if seeing her for the first time. "Your mad Harry, absolutely barking." "Headmaster it's something I read in a book, a very good book, called The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy. I highly recommend it. 42 is the answer to everything, life, the universe, everything, according to the author. I made it my answer to any mind probe."

Remus was making snorting noises, his eyes tight shut. Albus stared at her. "You pranked me?" Harry nodded. "Yes sir. I thought it would confuse most wizards, most especially Voldemort since he would not like the emotions behind the thought." "Did maintaining your shield drain you Harry?" "No sir, it didn't seem to require effort." "I see. Continue to practice Harry, however it would seem that your shields are at least able to withstand all I can do. I would venture to say you are safe in your mind from all but Lord Voldemort, and from him unless he has protracted contact with you." Harry gulped, that meant her being his prisoner and under torture for an extended time.

Albus turned his attention to Hermione. "Legimens" he murmured again staring directly at her. There was a long silence, while Harry grew increasingly agitated. She stared at Hermione who seemed perfectly relaxed, her face smooth and her eyes clear. Finally Dumbledore gave a sigh and spoke again.

"Much more the usual defense Miss Granger. And very robust I might add. I am relieved that I wasn't pranked again, and congratulate you on your progress." Harry tried to hide a grin behind reaching for a lemon drop.

"You have mastered this art to the level that I can test you without causing you irreparable damage. I would say you are safe to the same extent as Harry. Should Voldemort have extended contact with your persons, you would likely fail. Please continue to practice and improve your defenses, each of you. I should like to see you combine your styles. Perhaps as layers. We should have Nicolas or Perenelle test you next time. Their abilities have a different hue than

mine, perhaps they can suggest further improvements. Moving on, I do feel confident that I can discuss with you anything you care to ask me."

Hermione's eyes literally glowed and her brain locked up. This was a huge opportunity. Harry slid in under the radar and got the first question. "How did Voldemort and I survive the killing curse sir?"

"I am not sure Harry. Can you tell me if you recall anything of the event?" "I have a recurring nightmare sir, of screaming and a green flash. Occasionally I dream of a flying motorcycle." Dumbledore nodded. He frowned into space a moment then spoke. "Have either of you read or heard of a pensieve?" Hermione knew of course. "Yes sir, it is a magical container for the storage and display of thoughts and memories." "Take five points for Gryffindor Miss Granger, you are correct. I have one here. Miss Pomfrey would you be willing to have me search your mind for that exact memory?"

When the Headmaster called her Miss Pomfrey Harry knew it was an official request. "All I have of that night is the nightmare sir." Albus demurred. "On the contrary, you do have that memory in your mind, very deeply held. It would be in a place with your painful secrets. Please consider carefully what other things you might have stored there and if you wish me to see them." Harry's eyes flickered to Hermione. "Could you promise me that what you see other than that memory stays private sir?" "I would insist on making that promise Miss Pomfrey."

Harry turned to her court of final appeal. "Fawkes?" The phoenix soared to her shoulder and stared into her eyes. As always with Fawkes the joy, hope and amusement with which he viewed the world was there. Under that was his sense that if the truth was sought, the truth should be offered. Harry heard the lesson again and nodded, still frightened of some truths. Fawkes sent a wave of comfort with a sense of patience, Harry could wait to face the truth she was playing peekaboo with. "Yes sir, alright then."

"Lower your defenses please Harry. Legimens" The gentle touch of the Headmaster came into Harry's mind. She opened a door in her walls, and lit a torch for him to see by. He walked softly, with assurance. She could sense that the connection was not one way, he was as open to her. His overwhelming faith in the inherent good

of people flowed through her, softening her city bred cynicism. She felt his titanic magical power and felt dwarfed by it. No wonder the Dark Lord feared him.

She walked with him into the dark places, the places that come to the front in dreams and in fear. He reached for her hand and she was comforted by it. He moved softly past the worst of her, all her pettiness, all her rampant insecurity concerning her gender, all the angst and the angst about the angst. In a dark and hidden corner was a baby's crib. "There it is Harry. Fix it in your mind now as we move back to the surface. You don't have to remember it now, just know it's there and you can remember it."

Albus reached over his desk and placed his wand to Harry's temple. "Do you have the crib firmly in mind Harry?" She nodded. The Headmaster murmured a spell and slowly drew his wand away from her temple. A long silvery strand hung from it. He stood and moved to a cabinet. He opened it and deposited the strand in a stone bowl with a gentle flick of his wand.

They gathered around the bowl he placed on his desk. The memory swirled about in the pensieve, vaporous. "Just touch a finger to it and we will enter the memory." They followed the Headmaster's direction.

Harry stood in a nursery. Hermione slipped an arm around her waist as Remus put an arm over her shoulders. Dumbledore laid a comforting hand on her head and murmured "Nothing here can hurt you now Harry. This is your past. Let us look carefully to see what we may learn."

He moved into a corner to watch the crib. Harry and her support team moved closer to the crib, she looked at her infant self sleeping quietly, bottom in the air, face against a plush toy deer with a well chewed antler. "I remember that toy, and you insisted on sleeping that way. Drove you mum mad." Remus was close to tears, or already crying, Harry couldn't be sure. She felt a tremendous pressure in her chest. It might have been pain or loss or pity.

They heard the voice of James. "He's here! Lily get Harry and get out! I'll hold him off!" There was the sound of frenzied footsteps racing towards the nursery, crashing spellfire, the deadly curse. Voldemort's laugh echoed up the stairs as Lily gained the room. She

looked around the room for a weapon, found none, she began to pile furniture before the locked door. A murmured "Reducto" and it was all splinters. "Get away from him girl, there is no need for you to die. Move away." His voice an evil hiss. "Not Harry! Take me not Harry!" "Move away now, you need not die." "No take me! Leave Harry alone, he's just a baby!" Again the killing curse, the green flash and Lily Potter slumped before her child's crib.

Voldemort moved forward, staring at Harry. Harry stood holding the bars of the crib, silent, wide eyed staring at his mother crumpled before him. He reached for her. "Mummy?" "So easy, so very easy."

Voldemort casually aimed his wand again. "Avada Kedavra!" Harry flashed golden just as the curse hit his forehead and caromed towards the Dark Lord. Voldemort made no sound, his eyes held a look of shock as he fell dead next to his last victim. Harry was crying now, blood pouring from his curse wound. "MUMMY!"

There was a skittering in the corner. For just a second Peter Pettigrew was picking up Voldemort's wand. He glanced at Harry. Their eyes met, Harry's hand still reaching for his mum. Pettigrew looked terrified and he was crying. With a pop, Pettigrew was a rat and gone.

Dumbledore did something and they were ejected from the memory. The four of them collapsed onto the floor of the Headmaster's office, Harry crying uncontrollably. Hermione had her arms wrapped around her a split second before Remus enfolded them both. Albus stood slowly, every one of his years on him. He moved to Harry and wrapped the group in his arms. "Fawkes please get Minerva and Poppy."

There were two very rapid flashes of phoenix fire and Fawkes was on Harry's shoulder singing and preening her hair. It was moments before Poppy had them all under a calming draught and in chairs with hot chocolate before them.

Minerva and Poppy experienced the memory and came out in tears. Harry and Hermione were huddled together in a chair. Harry was starting to feel ashamed and was victim of the occasional hiccup. Dobby and Limpy had shown up almost as soon as Harry had come out of the memory. They had seen it with Minerva and Poppy. Albus was regarding them quite intently. He had never sensed so much

power from a house elf before. They stood sentinel, grim, behind and to either side of Harry's chair.

Remus spoke suddenly. "Sirius. Oh my God, Sirius. It was Peter all along. We have to get him out." Albus went pale. Of the things that come crawling in the dark hours he would now have a new visitor. The realization that Sirius Black had been imprisoned, presumed guilty, for well over a decade without trial or even the standard questioning would haunt his nights.

Albus took command of the room. "I think we have had quite enough excitement for one day. Harry you have shown great courage facing one of your deepest fears today, and in the company of others. Our priority for the present is to see to you. I will be in touch with the Ministry in the morning to request a hearing for Sirius."

Harry looked up. "Sir? What became of his body?" "I cast Fiendfire on it Harry. It was totally consumed, we can be sure of that. His wand evidently was in the possession of Pettigrew. Perhaps Sirius will have answers as to it's location. Please Harry, you should rest now. Your courage is immense, however there is only so much that can be borne before you damage yourself. I think you nearly to that point. I can assure you, I will keep you informed of progress. May I wish you all a good evening." Albus stood and bowed them from his chambers.

The lot of them flooded to The Farm. Harry was tucked in by every one of them and slept with both elves and Hermione tangled around her. Remus kept the first watch. Occasionally tears would trace the lines of his face.

Harry stumbled through the next day, aching inside. She felt raw and bruised by the memory of that Halloween night. It would take time for the hurt to heal, she knew that. So she trudged through her days, doing her work, staying on top of her training and classes. They all noticed that her spark was gone, she seemed flat and listless. Hermione, Dobby and Limpy were in constant rotation around her, hovering until she snapped. "Please, I appreciate you wanting me to feel better but I just don't! Leave me be for a bit can't you?"

On that weekend she packed a rucksack with a lunch and headed into the mountains on a day hike. She pushed hard through the rough country, no destination in mind, just moving away from the

pain. Finally she was tired and sat in a clearing with a lovely view of the spring leaves and flowers. Life washed over and around her going about it's business without a care. A long long sigh escaped her and she slumped a bit. She put her pack behind her head as she lay in the new grass and closed her eyes in the spring sun. When she woke up it was early afternoon. It was a longer walk back, more leisurely than her driven tromp into the wild.

Less and less often she would find herself depressed over that night. She had faced it and was moving on.

Albus was in contact with the Ministry the next day as he had promised. He had to go as far as Madam Bones, head of DMLE before he got permission to visit Sirius at Azkaban. He left for the island fortress the minute she had finished the paperwork.

He and Madam Bones met with Sirius, and his jailers in a small cold stone room that reeked of despair. Sirius was a wasted shell of himself, his eyes haunted, he was thin and grim, filthy and ragged. Albus stood as Sirius entered the room, shackled and shuffling. "Hello Sirius. I am here to ask you to tell Madam Bones and I about the deaths of the Potters and Peter Pettigrew. I would like you to testify while under the influence of Veritaserum. Will you agree to do this?" Sirius laughed, teetering on the verge of insanity.

"Over ten years later you finally want to ask me what happened? Why now? Has he come back?" His voice was hoarse and often cracked. Albus answered politely "He has yet to attain a full body. He has made two attempts which have been foiled more by good fortune than for any other reason." "You never were much for answering questions Dumbledore, why now?"

"Certain evidence has just come to light that brings into question your guilt in the deaths of the Potters. I am very much afraid and ashamed that justice was not done in your case. Whatever animosity you may have for me, however well placed it undeniably is, please cooperate with me now so that we can secure your freedom."

Sirius nodded, his eyes fevered. He sat in the rickety chair provided and took the three drops of potion.

"What is your name?"

"Sirius Orion Black"

"Were you secret keeper for James and Lily Potter?"

"No, I was not."

"Who was that secret keeper?"

"Peter Pettigrew was the secret keeper."

"Who betrayed their location to Voldemort?"

"Pettigrew"

"Did you kill Pettigrew?"

"No, He tricked me and escaped."

"How did he trick you?"

"He cut off a finger, blew a hole in the street, transformed into his rat form and escaped into the sewers. He is a rat animagus."

"Did you have any dealings with Voldemort or his Death Eaters"

"Never. Except for fighting them."

Albus took a deep breath. "Madam Bones do you have further questions for Mr. Black?" She adjusted her monocle and squirmed a bit.

"Mr. Black what were your intentions towards Mr. Pettigrew when you found him?"

"To kill him for betraying James and Lily."

"Aurors who responded to the scene reported you laughing. Why was that?"

"I have no idea. I don't think I was sane at that moment. I may not be sane now."

Madam Bones looked into his haunted eyes and privately agreed with him.

"Aurors unshackle Mr. Black. He will be leaving with us. While there remain many questions, it is evident that there has been a grave miscarriage of justice here." Sirius began to laugh again. He couldn't seem to stop. He was stunned and taken to St. Mungo's by emergency portkey.

Sirius was to spend a considerable amount of time in St. Mungo's recovering from his time as a guest of the Ministry. Remus was adamant that he be able to visit his friend as soon as possible. It would be weeks before they met.

Harry met Xeno Lovegood in a little room off the back of the Great Hall shortly after Sirius was moved to St. Mungo's. He had come to speak to Harry about Voldemort's survival and what he knew about it. He also got to visit his beloved Luna and spend most of the day with her in Hogsmeade. He brought with him several notebooks filled with background information he had sifted through concerning Voldemort's life and disappearance. He let Harry copy the material with a promise that it wouldn't be used for publication. A good journalist protects their sources.

Harry was able to tell him Voldemort's true name, his parentage, and his true blood status. Xeno was shocked to learn Harry's source was Voldemort's diary. Harry had to call in her Auntie Minerva to clear Xeno's use of those facts in his paper. Mr. Lovegood was miffed to be allowed the information as background only. He would have to verify independently. Harry and Xeno agreed to work together to gather what information they could and share it with Auntie Minerva as final arbiter of what could be published and how.

Harry was several weeks pouring over the notebooks and fact checking against other sources where she could. She began a spirited correspondence with Mr. Lovegood. The Headmaster had some inner circle Death Eaters stashed under the Fidelius Charm somewhere. Harry made a list of questions for them. The Headmaster was able to answer some immediately from his own research. He would question the intent of others and suggest alternate phrasing that might reveal more, ask the Death Eaters and return with their answers.

Hermione pursued her own researches into the genesis of elves and the myth of the gem that bound them. Her first source was of course Dobby and Limpy. They were sure they didn't know anything but she was relentless, asking after fables or stories told to their children. Hermione stalked the aisles of the library at Hogwarts, irked beyond all reckoning that the shelves didn't provide her with the answers she sought. She had long talks with Madam Flamel about alternate libraries where there might be a wider selection. They were able to find various mentions of a gem that matched the description given to the girls and Hagrid by Arawen on that winter solstice evening.

Under the direction of Madam Flamel Hermione began a correspondence with several noted gem experts and historians. Slowly she found bits of knowledge. She yearned to travel to the other great libraries of the magical world, especially the library at Alexandria, known to have some of the oldest source material. She wrote to the Romans as well, the abbess and Father Ralph, asking for their assistance tracking the gem and any information concerning elves that Rome might hold.

Exams came and went with Hermione again the top student in the school to no one's surprise. Harry did quite well also, being top in Defense again, and that by a good margin, as well as doing very well in her other classes. Her Aunties were pleased.

Sirius was released to the care of his good friend and fellow Marauder Remus in the middle of June. He set up housekeeping with Remus in his comfortable little house on the grounds of the Farm. Sirius and Harry were a bit formal to begin with until Remus pranked Sirius quite badly and Harry fell off her chair laughing. There followed a water fight that had Limpy twisting her ears trying to get all the damage fixed. Aunt Minerva made the miscreants pitch in along Limpy. From that day on the three of them would spend at least a little time together every day. Often they would spend whole days together as Sirius healed.

Sirius was very curious about Harry and often tried to question her, Harry insisted that she would answer him as soon as he mastered Occulumenty so he could protect the information. Sirius took that caveat as confirmation that Harriet Pomfrey was Harry Potter under a glamor and tried multiple spells to disperse the illusion. It was a grudgingly studious mutt that trained in the mind arts.

Sirius was a talented wizard and former Auror. He had seen combat against Death Eaters and had fared well at it despite his headlong style of fighting. Remus and Sirius would pair up on the girls during the daily training. The girls were now quite formidable having tremendously fast reactions, growing physical strength as well as a growing amount of magical power.

They held some secrets back from Sirius, the Goddess armor and staffs, the light sabers. He was critical of their continual practice with swords, claiming that usually blades slowed down the user and split their attention so badly that it wasn't a combat effective strategy. Harry and Hermione started to work the elven method of traveling into their dueling and became holy terrors, fighting in three dimensions at lightning speeds. It took Sirius, Remus and Flitwick to be able to challenge them, anything less they would win in seconds.

Before the end of the summer the Headmaster would join in the fight against the girls. This combination they couldn't beat with the weapons at their disposal. Full on combat practice with light sabers was just not possible. Something other than blood and the occasional tooth would be on the training floor.

Harry continued to work on sensing spells coming at her so as to be able to blind block incoming curses and hexes. She would train for hours with the golem that Flitwick had built for her, training blindfolded with glowing saber in hand. Slowly her percentage blocked rose.

Sirius continued to improve in spirit as well as in body. He had visits from Healers every few weeks and would often be moody afterward, but overall his health was coming back to him. He was tan and become fit as he adopted the training regimen of the girls. He was putting on weight, but he wasn't happy. Remus was his usual gentle self, spending what time he could with his old friend and including him in the doings of the lycan village. Sirius lacked direction other than his recovery and it was starting to show.

Remus appeared at his bedroom door with two bottles of firewhiskey and a pizza. "Alright then Padfoot?" Sirius glanced at him then stared. After graduation Remus and Sirius had lived together and had often discussed the state of the world and their place in it over pizza and whiskey. The mutt grinned. "Aye Remus, looks like we

have an evening ahead yes?" Remus could sense he was of two minds concerning the coming discussion.

They had demolished the pie and were well into the bottom half of the bottle and considering another pie when Sirius finally got loose enough to begin the real talk.

"Moony old man, do you know what I hate more than anything in the world?"

"Pettigrew?" Remus floo called for a pizza delivery from the village.

"Him too. But Dementors. I hate Dementors. They shouldn't exist. I want to end them Moony. I want to make them extinct." Remus looked at his friend. Sirius was totally, well, serious. The wolf nodded and paid the pizza kid. "They are foul, evil." They drank. "So what do you propose Padfoot?" They had a good bit of the second pie gone. "I propose we kill them before Moldyshorts comes back and gets them and what they guard just like last time."

The second whiskey bottle was dying a quick death. Remus nodded. "You think they will turn on the Ministry again?" Sirius nodded. "Of course. But that isn't all of it Moony old man. They shouldn't exist. They need to not be." Remus regarded his friend a bit blearily. "But how Paddy? Nothing kills them." "Dunno Moony, guess we need to figure that part out. They have bodies. Anything with a body can die. They breed." Both men gave an involuntary shudder at the thought of Dementors breeding. Remus couldn't help himself "Do you suppose there are girl Dementors? Dementor dates? Dementor births?" There was a pause as they both considered the social and sexual life of Dementors.

It took several scourfys to clean the revolt of their stomachs off of the kitchen floor and themselves. "That was so not what I needed to think about Remus." "Sorry Sirius, maybe we can get Dumbledore to remove that particular bit." Sirius nodded fervently.

"Still though" Remus rolled his eyes, Sirius would never let this go. "They need to be gone." Remus stared at his friend. "Alright then Padfoot. I do hereby declare that the Marauders are at war with the Dementors. First order of business. How to kill them. You have access to the Black family library. See what you can find on them. I have an idea I would like to test, it will take some setting up though."

Both looked at the mostly empty bottle of firewhiskey and decided that any more of that was out of the question for the evening. They toasted their crusade with cold water and wavered off to their beds.

Disclaimer: Harry Potter and all the other good stuff is JKR's. I don't own any of it.

When Harry got word that the Weasleys had won a galleon draw from the Daily Prophet she couldn't have been more pleased. For the red heads it was a change from their long struggle with money. The family decided it wasn't enough to worry over and spent it on a great vacation to visit Bill, the eldest, who was a curse breaker in Egypt. Harry and Hermione were successful in attaching themselves to the trip by pitching the educational aspects of the library at Alexandria and the unique opportunities available to them as a guest of a Gringotts curse breaker.

Harry really wanted the pith helmet no matter that it was fantastically out of style.

The mass of them took an international port key from Heathrow to Cairo early in July. Bill was to meet them at the terminal and help guide them to the magical quarter. There was a good bit of struggling to get everyone on the same path and moving in the same direction. Hermione was willing to take charge, she knew the best way having read countless books in preparation. Bill won out with his local knowledge. He had obtained the use of a Gringott's car for the Weasley's stay.

For the first time Harry could say she found someone attractive. Bill was very handsome, much too old for her, and very cool. He would have been right at home on Haight Street with his earring and his dragonhide boots. Harry was absolutely not a girl to giggle and blush but she certainly did appreciate it when Bill crossed her view. Molly derived great amusement watching Harry and Hermione tracking Bill like heat seekers.

The magical quarter of Cairo was magnificent. It was thousands of years old and showed it in places. The girls spent hours drifting through the bazaar under assault from all the sights and smells. Auntie Poppy had warned them about trying street food, that they would likely have a bit of trouble as their stomachs weren't used to the highly spiced flavors.

Hermione's first act on hitting Egyptian soil was to make arrangements to visit the library at Alexandria. They had so much they needed to know about. The library had many holdings unique in

the world. She was equipped with letters of recommendation from Madam Pince as well as the Headmaster and Auntie Minerva. Harry was able to beg off of her library trip on the grounds that the visit to the digs might reveal some clue to their mysteries that would be missed if one of them weren't there. It was a poor excuse, it would never have been found worthy if Hermione wasn't so distracted by the looming wonders of books, lovely never before seen books.

"Mione I would just be in your way, you know your better at research than anyone, and if we don't have one of us at the digs we could miss something really important." "Like what Harry? Bill lifting heavy things?" Harry had the grace to blush a bit while snorting to show just how much a day listening to Bill had no part in her decision to see the cursebreaker's job site. "Oh Please Hermione, I am not Lavender! He is very attractive, we all know that, now moving on. This is a chance to see something no one else has." "But Harry that is just my reasoning for the library!" "Well someone saw it Mione, after all someone wrote it." It was Hermione's turn to huff. "Yes and someone built it! And cursed it!" Harry had yet to win an argument with her, but never failed to try.

A few days later in the trip Harry arranged to visit the library while Hermione switched to be at the current dig.

Harry was interested in magical rituals that could enhance power and abilities for the light side. Everyone knew there were Dark side rituals. Some of the books and scrolls Hermione has seen at the Alexandria library held whispers of blood sacrifices and murder as the sealing acts of some very powerful rituals. Harry rather thought that Riddle might have done some or all of them in his attempt to become immortal and most powerful wizard of all time.

He had certainly done something that bound his soul to the worldly plane. Perhaps there was a light ritual that would free his soul, and allow him to move on to the next place. The next very very hot place would work for her.

She made her way to the reference desk and filled out the small form asking for the assistance of a reference librarian. An elderly gentleman named Hassim bowed to her and guided her to a small sitting area with tea arranged for two. "Miss Pomfrey, I am most pleased to make your acquaintance. Your Headmaster and I have had many pleasant conversations over the years, how may I be of

help?" "Sir I am interested in rituals that would assist a spirit bound to this plane to move on. I am not interested in dark rituals, could you direct my research, perhaps suggest some readings?"

"A most interesting question Miss Pomfrey. You speak as if rituals were, of and in themselves, dark or light. Certainly for a few this is true but for many there is the matter of intent. Always with magic intent is crucial do you not find it so? Of the rituals that are certainly light there is exorcism." "Would that work on a spirit that wasn't close in space to the ritual sir? If we performed an exorcism here for a ghost at Hogwarts would that ghost pass over?" "I am afraid not, the ritual form requires some physical presence to be effective. Allow me a moment to consider those tomes which might be of use to you my dear."

They sat and sipped their tea in calm silence. Harry felt the gentlest of mind probes. "Is that you testing my shields sir?" Hassim looked into her eyes and the probes intensity became very strong indeed. "Stop this right now!" Harry was on her feet, wand at his throat in a flash. The intensity of the probe increased. She stunned him. Still the probe dug at her defenses. Harry hurled the probe out of her mind and followed it to the mind of the caster. She stomped into the mind of her attacker and screamed her outrage at the assault. She had a brief sense of her opponents blinding pain before he lost consciousness.

Harry vaulted the little divan on which Hassim was slumped and poked at the wall behind. Her opponent was in there, somewhere behind that wall, a wall with no door. She drew her light saber and cut a hole in the wall. Stepping through the debris and dust she had created she moved to the obese figure slumped on the stone of the passage floor. He was young, only a few years older than she, and he was bleeding. Blood seeped from his ears, his eyes, mouth and nose.

Frightened by his stillness, terrified by what she might have done Harry crouched next to him, feeling for his pulse, checking for his breath. He was alive, a slow steady pulse. His breathing was quiet, almost like he was asleep. She levitated him into the other room and settled him on the floor by Hassim. "Enervate" she murmured. Hassim gasped and snapped upright. "Your friend here attacked my mind. I retaliated. He may need medical attention. Why was this done?" Harry stared at Hassim, directly into his eyes, fiercely

determined to know the truth. "I do not know why he did this, it was without my knowledge. He is my apprentice." "He is an apprentice research librarian?" "He is an apprentice wizard. I have been somewhat less than forthcoming. I am the Headmaster of a magical school here in Alexandria. I fear for this student, he had leanings that often end badly. Harry could see the truth of those leanings in Hassim's mind. The kid was certainly dark. She sighed. "Get him a healer. He shouldn't be bleeding from all the openings in his head, it's not a good sign."

Never would she criticize Dumbledore again, the old man was a model of logic and efficiency compared to his Alexandrian counterpart. It was when he left the room to get the healer that Harry truly smelt a rat. Headmaster of a school of magic and he walks to get a nurse?

Harry walked out the door after him. She laid her wand on her palm and whispered "Point me". Her breath came easily as she jogged along corridors and out into the more open areas of the library. There seemed to be no alarm raised, no sense of Death Eaters closing in. She found a deserted spot and popped to their hotel room. Immediately she put in floo calls to Professor Dumbledore and her Aunties. After a minutes thought she left a note that she would be outside watching the hotel and made her way to a cafe across the street and down a door or two. She sat back in the deep shade and watched the hotel.

Her espresso had yet to arrive when the local Aurors made the scene. They were undercover but they were Aurors for sure. She had spent too long in Golden Gate Park to not know a cop on sight. The little cafe had tapas so she tried a bit of this and that, and read a while in one of Hermione's books. The scene stayed busily normal until the arrival of the redheaded league with Hermione in tow. Harry paid her bill and idled across the street to her hotel, leaning against the wall and sending a listening charm on the window of their suite.

She didn't learn much for her effort. She was needed to answer a few questions, nothing major, nothing to worry about, just details to tidy up. Molly huffed into full protection mode and Hermione began probing for answers. Ron's only comment was "I knew if we left her alone she would get in a fight." Harry held position until she heard her Aunt Minerva come through the floo. Knowing reinforcements had arrived, Harry made her way to the suite.

Auntie Minerva was fit to be tied. "Miss Harriet Pomfrey you will explain yourself immediately!" Harry nodded agreeably. "To whom ma'am?" Minerva swelled up. Harry cut her eyes at the cops. Minerva displaced steam with several angry huffs.

She put on her coldest Professor with an errant student voice. "What is the meaning of this?" A vast improvement as far as Harry was concerned. Other people could try to explain. Harry might learn just why the Headmaster of the magical school of Alexandria acted like a squib, why she was mind probed, and what exactly they wanted to do to her now. Harry held her silence. The tension in the room grew like a weed.

Finally Molly broke. "These men have been asking for Harriet to answer some questions. They refuse to say what questions, or where she might have to go to answer them. They do say they are connected to the Egyptian Ministry of Magic. They do not specify exactly how they are connected. I, for one, do not think Harriet should go anywhere without an adult companion and some idea of when she will return." She glared at the men who were obviously white slavers. Hermione flickered a wink in Harry's direction. Harry studied the floor to keep from the snicker that was bulging her throat.

Harry felt a strong mental probe as she looked up at the cops. She threw it out with as much force as she could muster. The smaller cop reeled back several steps and sat down hard. "Stay out of my mind. Do that again and your ears bleed." Everyone in the room could hear the ice and truth of Harry's voice. As his partner scrambled to his feet, the other cop went for his wand. The Weasleys were not a weak or slow bunch and had been living in a bit of paranoia since declaring blood feud on the line of Lucius Malfoy. A small thicket of wands pointed at the two cops.

"Ridiculous! That is quite enough!" Minerva McGonagall didn't get angry often, but now was one such time. She made a sweeping motion with her wand "Pack!" Harry's trunk popped open, clothing, souvenirs, paper, books rushed inside. She picked up a postcard touting magical Cairo "Portus!" The card glowed blue for a second. "Put your hand on the card and your luggage Harriet, we leave immediately." Harry grabbed. The cops looked on mutely, dispirited. The amount of paperwork they would have to do over this was staggering. "Activate!"

The ill assortment of people watched as Minerva and Harriet disappeared in a whirl of color, dragged off to Scotland, to the Farm.

Professor McGonagall and Harriet steadied one another on their arrival at the Farm. Both Limpy and Dobby popped to them asking if all was well. Poppy was coming down the hall calling for news. Soon the family was seated in the kitchen with tea and a snack trying to understand the recent events in Alexandria. The floo flared and an extremely unfortunate looking woman peered into the room calling for Harriet. Harry was strongly reminded of a frog. She felt a chill looking at the woman's wide spaced glittering eyes. Harry felt her Auntie Minerva's back straighten even further than normal.

"Yes Dolores what is it?" "I really must speak to Miss Pomfrey Minerva. There has been a serious breach in relations with the Egyptian Ministry over some unwarranted attack by Miss Pomfrey on Egyptian Ministerial employees. Minister Fudge has asked me to clear up the matter."

"Miss Umbridge, Harriet is my ward. You will not question her without the presence of our solicitor. Please send an owl with a suggested appointment time and if our calendar is clear we will arrange a meeting." Auntie Minerva's smile would have chipped ice. She drew her wand and gestured. The floo connection closed abruptly on the rapidly flushing face of the toad woman.

With a long suffering sigh Minerva got to her feet and walked to the fireplace, she murmured spells changing the access protocols. When she was done she grabbed a pinch of floo power and tossed it into the firebox. "The office of Ted Tonks." Harry always thought that magical communication was sadly lacking compared to the muggle methods of telephones. A good thing in some ways as sales calls were few.

Minerva backed away from the fireplace after a quick conversation. A well dressed gentleman stepped through holding a yellow legal pad in one hand and a briefcase in the other. He introduced himself and was made comfortable with tea and tasty bits to munch on.

He led Harry through the events at the library and at the hotel several times taking copious notes. Poppy had floo called the Headmaster who was gently prodding his Ministry contacts to see

just whose ox had been gored. Fudge didn't send his hatchet woman out lightly.

Harry was meditating to clear some of the frustration and anger from her system while her aunties and Mr. Tonks talked. There was an officious tapping at the window. Harry stood and opened it to allow a very important owl entrance. A thick envelope from the Ministry dropped at Harry's feet and the owl swept from the room. Long habit kept Harry from immediately touching the envelope. Aunt Minerva checked for charms and disabled one that confirmed receipt by the addressee.

"Mr. Tonks as Harriet's guardians we would like to retain you to represent her in this matter." Aunt Minerva handed Mr. Tonks a galleon and shook his hand. There was a flash of a magical contract being entered into. "Since we will likely be seeing quite a bit of one another for the near future, please call me Ted." He picked up the letter and slit it open with practiced ease. His eyes widened considerably as he read.

"The Ministry demands the presence of Miss Pomfrey immediately. They make mention of what actions they will take should she not appear. They make no mention of their purpose in requiring her presence, nor of how long she would be gone. This is a blatantly illegal document. It is signed by Minister Fudge. He seems to have lost his mind."

Harry managed a word on her own behalf, it had been a long time since she felt she didn't have a say in what happened to her and she really truly didn't care for the feeling. "What actions have they threatened Mr. Tonks?" "They will send a squad of Hit Wizards to bring you in Harriet."

Harry shook her head. "Dobby" "Yes Miss Harry?" "Please pop us to Hogwarts right away, there is something stupid happening and people will get hurt if it continues." "Yes Miss Harry." Dobby grabbed the two nearest hands and popped away. Limpy got Harry and Mr. Tonks. They popped out just as they felt the anti portkey and anti apperation wards snap into place around their house.

They arrived in the infirmary. Aunt Minerva put the tip of her wand to the castle wall and murmured "Albus lock the castle down, emergency lockdown now, there is something strange happening,

we need to keep safe for the present." The Headmasters voice echoed through the castle. "Hogwarts emergency lock down, full defensive measures in place immediately. The group in the infirmary felt more than heard a massive "WHUMP" as gates, windows, tunnels all closed hard and fast. The Headmaster's voice echoed through the building. The statues and suits of armor stirred and stretched before moving off to take up defensive positions at the doors and lower windows. "Please attend me in my office as soon as you may."

The four trekked to the Headmasters office through an oddly martial and tense building. Harry could feel the deep strength of Hogwarts and knew a mere squad of wizards would never be able to enter against the castles will. The stairway to the Heads office was open. Dumbledore and Fawkes waited for them.

Albus was the first to speak. "The castle tells me that even now Auror's are arriving. It would seem that a good portion of the active Auror force is cooling it's heels at the entrance doors. Before we go to talk to them it might be best if I understood the situation." Auntie Poppy murmured "Mr. Tonks, if you please, tell Albus what we have learned and what you suspect."

The Headmaster listened attentively as Ted recounted the increasingly strange actions in Alexandria ending the tale with the frantically idiotic overreaction of the Ministry.

"Mr. Tonks, do you have the ability to guard your thoughts from mind magic?" "Yes sir, a solicitor must be a capable Occulumens as part of their profession." "Could I ask you please to leave the room for a moment. I have issues to discuss with your clients." Mr. Tonks nodded amiably, helped himself to a lemon drop, and went off to visit some of his favorite paintings.

"The only explanation that I have is that some group in Alexandria suspects that Harriet may be Harry Potter and sought to confirm that suspicion with a rather heavy handed mind probe. I am unsure what that groups connection with the Egyptian Ministry is. I do think there is one, even if ex-officio. I would speculate their equivalent to our Department of Mysteries."

"Minerva your quick removal of temptation from the Egyptians served to secure Harriet to our Ministry. It seems that Fudge has let

himself be convinced that he needs to do something about young Miss Pomfrey. I would imagine that our own Department of Mysteries is quite eager to obtain access to her. This, I think, would explain the rather heavy handed approach taken thus far. Dolores was never one for subtlety. She hopes to forestall the Egyptians, and to satisfy her employer and the Department of Mysteries. Momentarily I expect to see Cornelius attempt to bluster his way through the situation"

Right on cue the fireplace flared and the Minister of Magic attempted to step through, flanked by a cadre of Aurors and Madam Umbridge. They were visible for a moment before being thrown unceremoniously back through the green flames. Harry laughed until her stomach ached from the noises of the pileup on the other end and the soothing of some very ruffled egos. Dobby and Limpy were both hiding behind Harry sniggering, and even Minerva quirked one corner of her mouth. Albus was all concern and reconciliation in the floo conversation that ensued. He did not however open the connection to travel.

It was silly, even a farce, but it was an important fight. At basis was control of Harriet Pomfrey. Had she not had such adamant protectors she would have been an experiment in the Department of Mysteries before the day was out. The Headmaster and her guardians, ably assisted by Mr. Tonks made the Ministry name the reasons they felt entitled to unlimited and unsupervised access to Harriet. When forced to admit there was no reason other than some group in Egypt wanted that same access the Ministry types began to realize just how shaky the ground on which they stood actually was.

Mr. Tonks was merciless in his letters to the Daily Prophet and the Quibbler. Harry made a special run of the Howler, the school paper and sent it out to all the students. It was a prized edition for the picture of the Minister and his party being thrown back into a heap and the all too evident posturing of false importance and wounded overinflated ego. The picture did much to undermine the Fudge administration.

Over the next several days the castle remained in lock down while the Headmaster and Harry played hard at battle magic They fought every chance they got and agreed that there was no safe place. Large elements of the contest came to resemble a prank war. Peeves was delighted to assist whoever was closest to him at the

time. Harry learned more about dueling and surviving against an overpowering opponent that she imagined possible. Often she was only saved by her long practice sensing an incoming curse and popping away.

Eventually a rapprochement was reached with the Ministry was reached. Harriet might agree to answer some questions, questions to be reviewed by her advisers (ie Dumbledore, Mr. Tonks, and Fawkes) in return for the same courtesy from the Department. The Ministry buried their Egyptian counterparts under a mountain of paper making it clear they had another forest of paper waiting to be sent and that the whole matter needed to go away. The respective bureaucracies ground on.

Mr. Tonks pushed for the firing of Madam Umbridge but had to settle for a note of censure in her permanent file. Harry suggested he buy some life insurance when he saw the glitter in her frog eyes. Mr. Tonks had a certified copy of the note framed on his office wall. He called it one of his crowning achievements.

The Weasleys returned from Egypt having finished their visit with no further problems other than the loss of Ron's rat Scabbers. The rat had disappeared sometime during the kerfluffle with the Egyptian Department of Mysteries. Ron was really upset, he had wanted to stay in Cairo to search for Scabbers, but it just wasn't possible.

He remained upset until the yearly shopping trip to Diagon Alley when he found an amazing deal on a bandy legged part kneazle feline of dubious beauty and enormous size called Crookshanks. He loved the huge cat at first sight and thought Crooks quite intelligent. The rest of his family was reserving judgment. Crooks did love to chase the garden gnomes. He was losing a lot of his sedentary mass and getting to look quite muscular, like a lynx that had faceplanted a brick. The twins were running a pool on what he would do to the first gnome he caught.

Dumbledore called his best people to meet with him as soon as the worst of the Egyptian affair had died down. It seemed there was a rather determined search for Harry Potter and it had come very close to Harriet. The Headmaster wasn't sure what could be found by physical evidence of Harriet, evidence readily available to any competent spy.

Minerva suggested that they try to find out as much as they could about any link to Harry Potter from physical evidence of Harriet Pomfrey. Given that their methods were roughly as competent as the searchers, they would know what the searchers knew about Harriet. Even the most powerful magical means used by the staff at Hogwarts could not reveal Harriet as other than Harriet. Hermione had her parents speak to some of their professional friends. Muggle methods of comparison were not possible as there remained no known physical evidence of Harry Potter.

They were left with the situation as it had been for years. Harriet had an startling physical resemblance to James Potter. Nothing else was certain whatever might be suspected. Yet suddenly there was active probing for information and access, including probing by the Department of Mysteries.

The exchange of information between Harry and her Aunties on the one side and the Department of Mysteries on the other was stilted and cautious. Harry asked what Lily Potter did at the Ministry. She had worked with the Department of Mysteries. Harry was asked if she was Harry Potter. She answered she was Harriet Pomfrey. She asked what Lily Potter was working on. Mrs. Potter was working to develop more powerful defensive charms. The return question was unsettling. Would Harriet submit to testing of her magic at the Department?

There was considerable trepidation as Harry, Aunt Minerva and Dobby flooded into the atrium of the Ministry. They cleared security and headed down to the Department of Mysteries.

They were met by a Mr. Croaker. He was a pale man and slight. He led them to a plain functional office with not a mystery in sight. "I will be administering several tests of your magic Miss Pomfrey, you seem to have quite an unusual relationship with magic." He preformed several spells, muttering the incantations and wagging his wand various ways. Auntie Minerva looked on with a critical eye. So far she found nothing unusual. Croaker was testing Harry's level of power and speed of regeneration. Both were very very high given her age, but she had known that. He preformed a charm she didn't know.

"What was that charm Mr. Croaker?" "It is an indicator of the quality of her magic Madam, if she was a Dark witch that would have shown.

She is most certainly not Dark. In fact very few test as light as Miss Pomfrey." Harry felt a swelling of pride. Minerva nodded, she had expected nothing less.

Mr. Croaker had finished his tests and agreed to take them on a tour of the Department. They saw the Hall of Prophecy, the Time Room, the room that held the Veil of Death, the room of the Solar System. They stood before the locked door behind which Mr. Croaker said Love was. The door unlocked and opened a crack. A golden light poured like honey from the room and Harry heard her name being called.

There was a rushing noise. Hermione tumbled to a stop at Harry's feet. Harry helped her rise, they joined hands and walked into the room as if it was the most obvious thing in the world to do, perfectly logical and necessary. The door shut and locked.

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To say that Lucius Malfoy was an unhappy camper would be to understate the truth by several orders of magnitude. His life had been running downhill since he had gone to gloat over Dumbledore's failure to contain Slytherin's monster.

Dumbledore had proven equal to the task. Lucius was fed a heaping plate full of crow. The Headmasters veiled willingness to kill him out of hand should Lucius attempt to retain his power shocked Malfoy to his core. Lucius had signed away his power without a sound. The hatred that memory generated kept him moving.

He had dismissed Weasley's declaration of blood feud as mere bravado. Lucius would hire some bully boys and the redheads would disappear. That might have happened, if he had been given more time. He found his manor surrounded by several dozen talented and angry wizards and witches the very next day. Lucius discovered the relative strength of the power of love and the power of fear that evening. His allies faded back into the darkness when they saw the redheaded league arrayed before the manor with wards crashing into oblivion at an astonishing pace.

The Malfoys made it out of the area with nothing more than what they and their elves could carry. Lucius found shelter for the evening but by dawn they were on the run again. The records he had left at the manor meant all of his stocked and warded bolt holes were overrun and sealed.

He tried a desperate ploy with Fletcher, he had been close then, he could feel the avarice of Fletcher, Dung wanted that box. Something warned Dung off though and he avoided the compulsions that would have been placed on him had he so much as touched it.

The Malfoys fled the country. To say that Narcissia was not best pleased was the least of it. She had threatened to appeal to her Head of House if he failed to provide for her in an appropriate manner. Lucius tried to imagine what Sirius Black would do with an opportunity like that and shivered.

He still had difficulty believing that Arthur Weasley had so completely beaten him. The man was a drooling fool. He collected muggle plugs for Merlin's sake!

Arthur had also collected an impressive dossier on Lucius, including his muggle business interests. Without Lucius in direct control of his muggle drug trade several massive raids crippled his earnings. The records seized would result in even greater losses. The Malfoy fortune was shrinking at an alarming rate.

Lucius tried to restart up his drug cartel in France but soon found that he was encroaching on established territory and not at all welcome. That effort had cost him a nice chateau in the Burgundy region.

"Narcissia you need only stay for a little while. I have business to conduct in Albania of a most delicate nature. You would be a hindrance. I am afraid I may be living rough for the last part of the journey. You know you despise camping. Cousin Jorge has agreed to host you and Draco. Please see to enrolling Draco in either Beaubatons or Drumstrang. We may hope for Drumstrang, however Beaubatons does have a rather substantial scholarship fund. See that Draco applies for it."

Narcissia listened impassively to her husband. He was a fool, a sadist, and a coward. She hated him, had for many years. Cousin Jorge made continual fun of Lucius, only a bit of which he caught. She delighted in his fury at his impotence. Lucius needed his cousin much more than his cousin would ever need Lucius.

"I will see to Draco's education Lucius, you need not worry. I must tell you that I will attend to our future also. You should make your plans with no concern for us." He had nodded and left her room. She had kept a house elf to see to her and her son's needs. Lucius had departed for Albania before the noon meal.

He started from Jorge's house with three house elves and a large supply of goods, shrunk for easy transport. He found that the use of wizarding transport quickly resulted in the appearance of redheaded men. Two of his elves had been captured outside Prague. They had carried the bulk of his goods. He disillusioned the remaining house elf and attempted muggle transport. He was barely

able to manage with liberal use of confundus and memory charms. He burned to blast the idiot muggles into jelly.

Malfoy quickly found that the smaller countries had a relatively more efficient Ministry. They had arrived on the bloody scene of his tantrum at a customs station in under two minutes. Fortunately he was still quite a competent dueler and managed to kill both the Auror's responding.

That victory was a mixed blessing at best. The hunt was up for him in both the magical and muggle worlds. The last three hundred kilometers to Albania he walked. His elf kept him fairly comfortable by dint of a lot of very hard work.

Lucius planned his revenge in detail as he pushed his aching body kilometer after kilometer. As he got closer to his goal, word of Voldemort came to him. Rumors of a dark area, an area of strangeness in the wilds. A place of evil and death in the shadows, swift and silent. He passed dwellings with barred windows and doors, heavily guarded inns, well armed folk with wary eyes.

He lost his last elf when he fell asleep on watch.

Nagini made a quick kill of the elf and wrapped herself around Lucius. He awoke eye to eye with Nagini. It was the start of the hardest fight he had ever been in. His master required a human body and Lucius had one.

The Dark Lord was present in his Nagini. He would often migrate to other creatures to allow Nagini to regenerate some health as his presence in her slowly killed her. His presence in other beings quickly killed them, but no matter. Here in his exile the Dark Lord came upon his deepest desire. One of his Death Eaters had come for him.

That night Lucius beat back the Dark Lord. Had he lost his struggle, Voldemort would have possessed Malfoy's body as his own, and Lucius would have been no more. As it was they exhausted themselves in their battle for dominance.

"Voldemort I will have control of my body. I will do my utmost to assist you to a body of your own. We can have need of one another. Let us work together to renew your power."

"Slippery words Lucius, always with you much is promised little is given."

Lucius snorted "You spoke of leading a cleansing of the wizard race, so the pure of blood would rule as they should. Lies. You killed anyone who opposed you. I have received no benefit from your cause and lost much."

Lucius took careful aim and cast the Avada Kedavra at Nagini. The snake slumped dead before him. He felt the towering impotent fury of Voldemort. Lucius formed his thoughts tightly so the dim shade of Lord Voldemort could read them.

"I tire of this. You must accept that you are not what you were. We will work together or alone, make your choice. I will have an Unbreakable Oath from you Voldemort to do me and mine no harm before I help you."

Lucius fed the shade a bit of magic, crumbs before a sparrow. The shade stabilized enough to regain coherence. Lucius laughed at the incandescent rage of the spirit. Standing, Lucius started to move away, towards the coast, towards Egypt.

"I Lord Voldemort do swear to do no harm to Lucius Malfoy or to anything of his. On my soul and magic so mote it be!"

It was easily the high point of Lucius life, he had humbled the Dark Lord. "I have a plan Voldemort, I have located a body you can easily acquire, and in doing so I will attain revenge."

Lucius pulled out a cutting from the Daily Prophet showing the Weasley's before the Great Pyramids, winners of the Great Galleon Draw from the Daily Prophet.

Borrow my eyes and look carefully Master, look at the rat, look at the black haired girl." "The rat." The phrase was a long hiss of revenge.

Lucius and Voldemort both believed that Pettigrew had betrayed them resulting in the very near death of Voldemort at the hands of the Potters. What greater revenge than to take Wormtail's body to renew himself before killing the last Potter? "Yes Lucius, and the girl?" "She looks remarkably like James Potter." "You suspect this is

the child? That is not possible. Unless.." The spirit went silent while considering the alternatives.

"We will leave for Egypt in the morning Lucius. Nearby I have some store of provisions and a few items to help us in our struggle."

Lucius always was about half as smart as he thought he was.

Humming he moved along the road towards the sea, and a passage to Egypt.

It was a week later that Malfoy and the current embodiment of Voldemort debarked from a rusty wreck of a ship at a wharf in Alexandria. Lucius had been required to kill a wizard the Dark Lord attempted to possess when again Voldemort was beaten back. The man looked ready to raise an alarm, but the green flash of an AK from Lucius put paid to that danger.

They apparated to Cairo, the Prophet article had mentioned Cairo as being the center of operation of the Weasley's visit to Egypt. It wasn't long before Malfoy was disguised under glamors and lurking around the inn at which the Weasley party was lodging. The damnable redheads stuck in a pack at all times. There was a formidable amount of magical power in the adults and older children. Lucius was convinced that a direct confrontation would lead him straight to the grave, with company no doubt, but still - dead is dead.

And Lucius wanted to live, he had dreams to fulfill. He wanted to hear the screams of Arthur as he disemboweled Arthur's daughter, raped his wife and sons. He was a man of vision. He attempted a night infiltration and found he was unable to even understand the wards Bill had erected around the building much less those around the suite the family actually stayed in. His first effort at the outer ward brought a slight movement to a curtain in the Weasley quarters. He withdrew.

The Weasleys did believe in togetherness. They were aware that they had declared blood feud and were far from their home comforts and protections. Arthur drilled them to stay alert and stay together. The younger children were grateful for the training sessions they had taken part in with Harry and Hermione. The twins, Harry, Ron, Hermione and Ginny all agreed that they would be asking for training in building security in their coming sessions.

Lucius saw the mudblood split from the group and head off on her own. The Dark Lord was quite clear that she was not suitable as a vessel for his precious self. She might however be of use under an Imperious to gain access to the rat. The rat stayed very quiet behind the wards of the Weasleys. The Dark Lord could scent him in some of the forms he used up as they watched.

They waited, frustrated, as the days slipped away. Finally a chance to learn more about the girl who so resembled James Potter came. Harriet headed to Alexandria to explore the magical library there. Lucius and his Lord followed.

Lucius cast an Imperius on a minor functionary of the library and had him pose as first a research librarian, and then as a friend of Dumbledore, and a Headmaster. The damnable girl wasn't buying it and Lucius was running out of ideas.

Lucius lost his connection when Harry stunned his Imperiused helper. Voldemort launched a mental probe at Harriet, attempting to discern the truth of her parentage. The reaction was spectacular. Voldemort's probe was thrown back, traced, and his shade ejected from his host's mind in terrible pain. When Harry revived the poor librarian Lucius made some idiot excuse and removed his unwilling slave from the scene. Better to have him gone than to give the authorities a clue.

Lucius was able to attach himself to the Egyptian Ministry squad sent to search the Weasley suite after Harriet and McGonagall had left for Scotland. The Weasley's had taken down most of their wards at the request of the Egyptian Ministry and Lucius glamor held. He was inches from death facing a thicket of wands. The Weasleys stayed grouped together and had their wands out, refusing to relax so long as people they didn't know were in their quarters.

Lucius felt great satisfaction when in answer to a muttered "Accio Pettigrew" a fat rat soared from under a wardrobe into his hand. He stuffed the rat into a cage that was heavily warded. No one remarked on his sudden departure.

Lucius walked away from the Weasley's quarters with a bounce in his step. A simple potion to suppress Wormtail's magical ability and

Voldemort should have little trouble taking their revenge and his new body.

Lucius spent a good deal of his remaining gold on what turned out to be a simple but highly illegal potion, Wizards were understandably nervous about anything that could suppress their magic.

It was almost a week later that Lucius returned to the dingy room he had let in a questionable quarter of Alexandria with a bottle of the elusive potion. He grabbed Wormtail and poured potion into him as the rodent writhed and squealed in fright. As the potion took effect the rat went limp. Lucius watched as Voldemort took possession of the animagus. There was little to make the passage of Wormtail and the return of the Dark Lord to a human form. The rat twitched and stirred, a shadow drifted away as another was absorbed. The rat transformed to it's human shape.

Pettigrew had never been an imposing wizard, he was small, chubby, watery eyed, weak chinned. No one had ever called him handsome. Pettigrew with the soul of the Dark Lord was a different rat altogether. His eyes were red, and glowed a bit in the dim room. His posture straightened, he held a sense of command, of might.

Lucius bowed slightly. "Welcome back my Lord." Voldemort raised his wand, wishing for nothing more than to kill the man before him. He restrained himself, knowing that the oath he had taken while a spirit bound him now.

"Let us begin then Lucius. I require your Mark to summon my followers." "You have your own my Lord." Lucius smirked. The oath Voldemort had given him prevented the Dark Lord from summoning him, the summons was a massive surge of pain. Lucius watched the Dark Lord's brow ran with sweat as he pressed his own Mark.

The Dark Lord resumed his commanding stance. The popping of apparitions was music to him. All four of them. He waited. The four new arrivals looked for their Lord, and saw Malfoy and Wormtail. There were no other arrivals. None of the four were inner circle Death Eaters. They were not highly trained, nor particularly powerful. One was an employee at the Ministry in the Department of Floo Regulation and Control, one was Borgin of Borgin and Burke, the dark objects dealer in Knockturn Alley. Borgin had been in hiding for months, he had been quick to notice the steady disappearance of

free Death Eaters and had made himself scarce running his business through proxys. The other two were unknown to Malfoy and scarcely better known to the Dark Lord. They were foot soldiers, minor wizards recruited as cannon fodder just before that fateful Halloween so many years ago.

The Dark Lord put forth his power, letting his magic rise in him. He was sorely disappointed. His magical core was Wormtail's. He was not the ritually enhanced, awesome wizard that Tom Riddle had been. He was the Dark Lord's soul with Wormtail's magical abilities. He was little more than a squib with vast knowledge of the Dark arts. He felt a great deal of fear. "Let us plan together my servants for our return to power."

Dubious glances were exchanged. Borgin was a glorified pawn broker, he could figure advantage to the tenth of an ounce. The way he figured it, this group of five wouldn't stand a chance in a fight against Alastor Moody, much less Dumbledore. If the forces of the Light could find them, they were dead. And his former master had just ensured that the Light would know the Dark Lord had returned by summoning them. The hunt was up for sure now.

"My Lord, you are not as you were. We need to gain strength both individually and as a group, the five of us are nothing compared to Dumbledore and his friends." The rat's eyes glowed red. Voldemort hated the truth of it. He would need to modify the rat to be as great as he once was, or to create something new for his purpose. The odds of another Quirrell finding him, a competent wizard who would welcome in was very slim.

Those given to the dark are not given to kindness. He could see those others measuring him. Wormtail had been weak, slow, and stupid. Now he was not stupid. Lucius was easily the most powerful wizard in the room. Voldemort felt the rearrangement of the pecking order in the room. He was angrier than he had ever been in his existence.

"Our first priority must be to strengthen our numbers. I will convince the Dementors to our cause. With them we can free our brethren in Azkaban." The Dark Lord paused. He knew he had no chance to slip the magic suppressing potion to Lucius or Borgin, the other two were as weak as the Rat. He could take over a much stronger wizard once he had access to his followers in Azkaban. They would

be weak and disoriented from their imprisonment. They would gladly take any potion given them. "Borgin I will accompany you to your bolt hole in Britian. Lucius remain here and work to obtain us some competent wands for the coming fight."

The Dark Lord transformed into Wormtail and scurried into Borgin's coat pocket. The five wizards exchanged a long look. Lucius shrugged. "It seems our best chance gentlemen." Borgin thought Lucius really meant it seemed Malfoy's best chance. Borgin had much to consider.

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Harry and Hermione stood in a simple room. It was large, stone walled of the same pale gray stone as the rest of the ministry. The floor was a different stone, more colorful, perhaps marble. There was a fireplace with a cheerful fire burning, some comfortable couches and large soft seats arrayed around the room. They were alone.

"Harry what the hell have you done now?" It was conversational in nature, neither were fussed at all. They should have been at least a bit worried but both were at ease. Hermione seemed almost amused. "Um. Well. We were at the Department of Mysteries and the door to the room of love opened and you arrived and we walked in here."

Hermione blinked. "I was outside in the garden and felt like I was portkeyed. No idea what happened?" "None Mione, you just showed up and we walked in here. Why did we walk in here? It seemed so obviously the thing to do?" Hermione nodded.

They looked around a bit more. "Well I guess we should get back yes?" Harry shrugged and tugged on the door. It remained locked and closed. "I think full kit then Hermione." She nodded and they both concentrated on their goddess armor and staffs. Harry cast "Alhomora". There was a definite lack of unlocking and opening. Hermione tried some higher level spells with the same result. "What do you reckon Harry" Harry tried to apparate out of the room. Nothing. She tried to pop. Nothing.

Harry called "Dobby? Limpy?" There were two pops and the elves were with them. "Can you guys pop us out of here?" The elves grabbed an elbow each and made to pop. No result. Their eyes got even larger. "Nothing has ever stopped popping Miss Harry, I don't understand." Limpy closed her eyes and stretched out her magic trying to sense the reason for their failure. She shook her head, puzzled. "Nothing feels different Miss Harry." Hermione suggested that she try to just pop herself. Limpy disappeared and reappeared. "I can come and go Miss Mione. I told Mistress Minerva that you were here and safe. Do Misses need anything?" Hermione snorted. "We need to figure out why we are here and how to leave."

As if in answer a shimmer began off to the side of the fire. A woman of fierce and regal beauty phased into being before them dressed in robes that would have looked equally at home during Oscar night or gracing a statue standing on the Acropolis. Harry took off her helmet and bowed before the goddess who had given it to her. Hermione was a heartbeat behind her. The elves bowed low as their humans had. A small smile quirked the corners of the woman's mouth. "We meet again little ones. How strange that you have bound elves with you. Why did you call me?"

The girls had instinctively joined hands when the goddess had phased in. "We didn't call Highness, at least not intentionally." Hermione could never stand to not answer a question posed to her. "Do you know where you are little ones?"

Harry took a shot at this one, she was good at the obvious. "We entered this room from the Department of Mysteries at the Ministry of Magic. The Ministry thinks that the force of Love is in this room. I was with my Auntie and a man who works here when the door to this room opened and Hermione arrived. We walked in here and the door closed. I called the elves, they seem to be able to leave, but they can't take us, and we can't leave. We don't understand what's happening or why." Hermione indulged in some epic eye rolling.

The Goddess laughed a good rolling laugh shattering her image as imperious for the moment. "Imagine them thinking they contain this force. My dears you are here because you are needed here. All of you. Bound ones would you be free of your bindings?" Limpy and Dobby glanced at one another. "At what cost Mistress?"

She nodded, again regal. "A proper question, a question of depth. Should you be unbound the fate of your people will rest on you as well as on these, my maiden warriors. Even as time is reckoned in the halls of the gods, your kind has served overlong. Justice requires that the binding of your people cease. That you are called into the presence of Love by these to whom you are bound by ancient magic and by love allows me to sever your bindings. Will you have this?"

Dobby and Limpy looked at one another for a long minute. They grasped hands and bowed before Her again. "Yes Mistress, we will fight with the Misses"

The Goddess nodded and made a short gesture. Golden haze surrounded the elves and brightened to a raging light. Harry and Hermione had to close their eyes against the outpouring of magic, the bindings being broken could be felt. As each severed there was a snapping sharp pulse of magic the tore through the girls, rocking them on their heels. Seven pulses tore through them before the light started to dim.

Before the girls, holding hands as when the magic first took them were two tall slender beings. They were vastly changed from the Limpy and Dobby the girls had known. A strange beauty they had, an alien shape to eye and ear, a slightly different bone structure, higher of cheek, thinner of face. They looked like deadly swords, fierce and full of purpose.

The girls bowed before them. The Goddess smiled and bowed as well. "Well met eldest. Long has it been since your kind walked free, the time has come for you to walk upright again. Darkness is near, but true heart has always hope."

Dobby spoke, his voice was music, the clear note of harps. "We will not fail Queen." He turned to the girls "Harry, Hermione, much is changed between us my sisters. Limpy and I have some memories from the Goddess of a place where we may find some of our heritage. This quest we will need you to help us with, wizards magic needs to be undone."

"We are still brother and sisters. We are no longer servants, we will take our full place in our family. Truthfully we have not been servants in your hearts ever, or in ours, though ancient bindings held us. They no longer do so. Our part here is done, we will assume a glamor so as to avoid the attention of the Dark when we leave. Your aunties will want to see you soon, we will tell them you are well and will return." Still holding hands the two elves popped away.

Harry and Hermione turned to the Goddess. "What next Queen?" She smiled at them, a distinct hint of mischief in her eye. "My part in this is ended. Now you will undergo a purification of sorts. The forces that call forth gods and goddesses are many. The force of darkness has it's champion, it's Dark Lord." She sniffed, avoiding laughter just barely. "All does not go well with him currently. Perses, the ravager, has chosen poorly for this round of the great game."

They bowed to her again as she shimmered away, laughing.

Despite holding as tight as she could to Hermione, Harry felt her less and less. She was alone in the golden light, suspended with her doubts and fears. The great fears bound with love coursed through her. Fear of risking her heart and being found unworthy. The pain of rejection. Her fear of being alone, alone forever in her heart despite knowing in her mind that she would never be. This fear had its stubborn roots deep in her soul. She was an orphan, she knew abandonment and abuse. Those feelings had shaped her along with the constant love of Limpy and her Aunties, and before them of her parents. Harry hung in that pain and fear for a subjective eternity. Slowly she came to the realization that she was not losing those fears, they were part of her, had shaped her in basic ways. What she found was that she could love despite those fears. Even if Hermione never wanted her the way she wanted Hermione Harry could still love her, fully, completely. What she feared was not having her love returned. She didn't fear at all loving Hermione, or Dobby or her Aunties, or her friends. She feared them not loving her back - them stopping loving her. When she accepted that possibility and allowed it, knew that it was real, that death happened, that people had their lives outside of hers, she began to know that love was its own reward and no response was required. The world formed around her again, she was standing with her helmet under her arm, holding Hermione's hand in the beautiful and austere room.

Hermione turned to her and smiled, a brilliant glowing smile. Harry leaned forward to her and brushed her lips over Hermione's. "I love you Mione." Harry pulled back and grinned at her. "Shall we go?"

Hermione had learned the same lesson, that love was its own reward, and not subject to fear. She hadn't thought of Harry that way before, as someone to be with. She found the idea startling and maybe a bit appealing, with the delicious overtones of the forbidden. "Harry? I need a while to sort things, but I liked that kiss. Lets go set the Aunties at ease, they must be frantic by now." Harry blushed and nodded.

The girls phased their staffs and armor out of place and opened the door. Hand in hand they rejoined Harry's frantic Auntie Minerva.

It was hours before they were able to free themselves from the tender mercies of the Department of Mysteries. Harry and Hermione

had given the Unspeakables memories of the time in the golden light facing their fears about love. They didn't allow the Unspeakables to know anything about the Goddess. Both of them wanted to have a life outside of the Ministry rather than as an object of study by some smelly wizard with no fashion sense. No one thought to question Dobby popping back and forth. The invisibility of servants was a useful tool.

It was several days before the girls started to notice a difference in their magic. The girls daily practiced accuracy on moving targets. Harry always did this exercise with her eyes closed, so Hermione had to keep a sharpish eye on Harry's wand. She had often been caught by a spell from Harry when one of the targets put her between Harry and it. They were using stinging hexes, enough energy to register a hit. Hermione was thinking of her time in the golden light as she split her attention between Harry and the target she was tracking. Hermione tracked and fired. The target disappeared in dust. With her attention divided, Hermione picked another target and dusted it again. Harry came out of her semi trance to find out why she was losing targets, it hadn't happened for a long time that she lost them. She watched as Hermione burst the third and lost her mental focus in her annoyance at a weak hit.

"Mione? What spell were you using?" "Stinger Harry just like always." "You blew up three in a row Mione." "Blew up?" Harry nodded. They turned to Remus who was paying somewhat less than stellar attention at the moment, he and the mutt had been in the Three Broomsticks until too late last night. "Remus? Did you see Mione dust three targets?" He shook himself into a semblance of alertness and counted the remaining drones. "Huh". There was a long pause. "Do it again Hermione."

She cast her usual stinger with her usual results. Hermione's reputation as the smartest witch of her generation was well deserved. She started eliminating variables. It wasn't long until she had a working hypothesis and ran her test. She held Harry and love in her mind then fired a stinger, vaporizing the target - no dust left. She wasn't as distracted by worry about Harry blind hexing her and hit the target even harder.

Remus worked at linking his positive feelings to his casting and found a significant power increase even if not as pronounced as the girls. Harry only had to be shown once and she was off with

massively overpowered spells. Sirius had a much more difficult time with it. His casting stayed the same until he linked his hate for Dementors to his magic. Then his spells ripped through the air, faster and much more powerful than his normal casting. He found using his magic that way left him exhausted and heartsick. That night he had the worst nightmares since he got out of Azkaban.

The next day the wolf had words with the dog. "Sirius if you are going to use the power of emotion and intent in your casting you had better be sure the emotions and intent are something you can live with. Anger and hatred will work, but the cost you are feeling now is just the beginning of what will come due should you continue. The girls are doing so well using the power of love because they are very nearly pure."

They have passed through the Department of Mysteries Love Chamber." Sirius snorted and bit back a smart remark about the Love Chamber. "They have been blessed by a Goddess and sealed to the cause of the elves of old. Fawkes comes when Harry needs him. There is not a lot purer than that."

"Moony old man I understand about the darkness and the price. The healers have said the same thing. In fact I have been considering a rather drastic measure. They offered to remove the memories of Azkaban from me. I would have knowledge that I had been there, but the actual experience would be out of my head. I haven't done it because, well, it's part of me. Who would I be if I didn't live that time? A newly minted Auror? Would I feel like I had just lost James and Lily and Harry again? I don't know if that would be an improvement Moony." Remus stared at his friend for a minute. He stood and crossed the kitchen to where Sirius was leaned against the counter sipping his morning coffee.

The wolf stared from his eyes. "Marauders honor Sirius, they still die. All of them. We will kill the Dementors. Come with me."

They flooded to the Farm, and gave good mornings to their family there, Harry, Hermione, the Aunties, and the elves. Sirius was talked into a bit of breakfast whipped up by Harry and Limpy, a massive stack of pancakes and a mound of bacon. The Aunties headed out for the days errands, reminding the girls to not delay their training to much longer. As the old dog ate Remus pulled Harry aside. "Harry can Sirius have a saber?" Harry looked a bit startled. "Can he shield

his mind Remus?" Remus shrugged. "Some yeah, we need to have the Headmaster test him to see if he can hold his shields." "Yeah sure Remus, I will make him one if he can hold his shield."

Remus made the floo call to the Headmaster's office while Harry put more batter on the griddle, the Headmaster was very fond of blueberry pancakes. Albus stepped through declaiming that he couldn't possibly eat a second breakfast. Harry set the food before him and he started on it still talking about how he couldn't. Somehow all the pancakes disappeared in very short order. Leaning back in his chair. Albus looked extraordinarily content.

"I am glad to be here, there is news we need to share. I have heard from Croaker that Harry and Hermione have had their usual effect on events, the ordinary became quite the opposite." He regarded the girls with his generous smile and twinkling eyes. "Croaker told me that door hadn't opened for almost 16 years. It last opened for Lily Potter. She was researching magical defenses hoping to develop a block for the unforgivable curses. He sent Lily's notebook along to me in case I ever find Harry Potter."

Harry focused on the notebook, now sitting next to the Headmaster's teacup. Her mother's work. Her mother's writing. Albus smiled at her as he stood and moved to the sitting room, leaving the notebook on the table. Harry cleared the dishes to the sink and put the notebook in her room before rejoining her family and Albus.

She walked into the room just in time to hear the Headmaster say "Yes I am sure, there can be no doubt. The Marks are as clear and as fresh as if just cast - he is back in corporal form. His servants were called to him not two days ago, only he was able to call them. I have both private reports and reports from Azkaban through the Ministry. Fudge, of course, denies the whole thing as the raving of fanatical followers driven to madness."

Sirius was pale and shaking. Remus looked sick. Harry's Dumbledore looked quite serious but confident. "I will be recalling the old order to active status, I should like you all to be there, except of course, for the girls." Harry stared at Hermione. She looked like she was about to faint but her voice was steady.

"Headmaster? What can we do now to fight him?" Harry nodded from Hermione's side, holding her hand. "You my dears? You need

do nothing, your far too young to have an active part in this struggle. It will be some years before you will be ready to go to war."

They looked at one another knowing the tasks given to them. "Professor, please test how well Sirius can defend his mind. We have some ground to cover."

Albus raised his bushy eyebrows but pulled his wand and murmured "Legimens" at Sirius. A few minutes went by and Sirius started to sweat a bit. Albus concentrated and his power rippled through the room, almost visible. Suddenly they both relaxed. "Very nicely done Sirius. I admit I am impressed. The use of Dementors as your guardians is most novel." Albus spoke to the group at large "He has very robust shields. We can speak freely before him."

Harry concentrated for a minute and changed her gender. He stood before Sirius and held out his hand. "Godfather, I am sorry that it is so long between meeting you and showing you this Harry. I have been able to avoid the attentions of Voldemort by being Harriet. I like being her better than Harry." Sirius was grinning his dog grin. "I knew it, I could smell it. I figured this was the reason." He started to laugh. "Lily must be so pleased!" Harry started to laugh along with Remus and Hermione who had heard the story of Harry's first meeting Remus.

Remus gave Harry a significant glance, Harry nodded at him. Remus pulled his saber and lit it off. The snap and hiss of the blade forming was always a thrill to Harry. Sirius twitched and gaped at Remus and his saber. "So that explains the swords." Albus always loved drama and his golden blade lit. Harry and Hermione were not to be left behind. The hum of the blades filled the room. The blades hissed out of existence at almost the same time. "How do I get one?" No matter the odds, no one would take Harry's bet that Sirius wouldn't want a light saber. Sirius flooed to Diagon Alley for a wand and had a saber before the hour was out. His blade was the color of blood. He swept it before him, feeling the pull and resistance of the blade.

Sirius eyes blazed. "Dementors. This thing will cleave a Dementor, I'm sure of it." Albus nodded. "I think you may be correct Sirius. I am recalling the Order of the Phoenix this evening. Riddle has attained a corporal form sufficient to call his servants through the Dark Mark. We must move quickly to secure those assets he will most desire.

We must have control of his Death Eaters. The Order will storm Azkaban. We will need every wand, every patronus.

Harry glanced at Hermione and together they lifted their wands. "Expecto Patronum." It was a murmur, said almost in unison. Harry's stag erupted huge and glittering, Hermione's otter paced to the stag's side. The spells were a rich silver, with hints of gold. Remus had seen them, had taught them to cast the spell. Albus and Sirius were in shock at the size and seemingly solidity of the spells. Fawkes landed on the Headmaster's shoulder and warbled to him.

The Leader of the Light sat heavily in his chair, pale and trembling. "The girls must be at the storming of Azkaban. We will fail if they are not present. Fawkes has warned me."

Harry eyed Fawkes carefully. Fawkes held his gaze and sang one note of certainty. Harry focused and reformed as Harriet. She sighed in something like relief. "When will we be attacking Headmaster? Can we keep the Aunties from knowing?"

Albus winced at the thought of the coming discussion with Minerva and Poppy. He would also have to speak to Mr. and Mrs. Granger. No sane parent would allow their thirteen year old daughter to go to war but to war they must go if the Light was to have a chance at victory.

"No Miss Pomfrey we will not be dishonest. Your Aunts will be informed, as will Miss Granger's parents." Harry and Hermione winced in sympathy for the bollocking Dumbledore would be taking.

Remus, ever the soul of discretion ended the discussion for the day. "Ladies, I think we have some practice we are missing. Albus we will leave you to your less than pleasant chores." The old wolf didn't even attempt to hide his grin. The headmaster slumped in his chair and reached for a lemon drop as a consolation prize. The girls popped Remus and Sirius back to the barn for training. Sirius was much more attentive when they began sword practice.

The next evening the Order of the Phoenix met for the first time in over a decade. The Headmaster and Alastor Moody had been the capture team for the free Death Eaters. Now they led the planning for the attack on Azkaban. Albus told Alastor everything, that they had a weapon they thought would kill Dementors, that the girls

would be required for success according to Fawkes. Moody was the jailer for the formerly free Death Eaters and so knew that Riddle had attained a physical form sufficient to call his minions. "Albus you have lost your tiny mind. You want to bring two little girls to Azkaban to fight Dementors?" Dumbledore sighed at the thought of how many times he would hear this and how often he would have to attempt to convince hardened and skeptical warriors that those girls were necessary.

"No Alastor, I most definitely do not want to bring them. Fawkes tells me they are required for success." "Oh well lets listen to the bird then. Give me a month and I will have a parrot saying leave them at home. What the hell are you thinking?" "Alastor a phoenix is more than a bird. They are beings of the light." "Aye Albus, they are. So are unicorns. That doesn't mean we get a fancy horse to do our battle planning." At this the Headmaster laughed. "You are correct, we get an old war horse to do our battle planning." His eyes twinkled at Alastor.

"Yes, I will plan it out. We will not be hurting any Aurors. We will not be releasing anyone but Death Eaters, and only to our tender care, are we agreed?" The Headmaster nodded.

"Care to help me talk to Minerva and Poppy Alastor?" It was a throw away question. Moody was already paranoid, there was no way he would throw himself under that particular bus. The old Auror took a pull from his hip flask and shook his head. "Better you than me old coot. You will be lucky to live through that one. What about Grangers parents?" "I hope to have less difficulty with them Alastor." Moody cast the beady eye on his friend. "Have you met them Albus?" "No I have not had that pleasure." Moody snorted. "Some Muggles get right stubborn Albus, magic show or not. If they are anything like her, you may find Minerva and Poppy the easier sale." The two old warriors adjourned to the main meeting.

Minerva and Poppy had offered the Farm as a meeting place for the Order. The wards were first class and the location was easy to reach from Hogsmeade and it's many floo points.

Harry and Hermione were upstairs in Harry's room waiting for the explosion they expected when their part in the plan was made known. Despite having the blessings of the elves and the Goddess the terrible twosome found they couldn't hear a word of the meeting.

They did get a glimpse of a few dozen witches and wizards filing into the dining room. Much later they saw the same people leaving. The people leaving seemed to have a much grimmer look to them. They seemed to have picked up worries in the meeting.

During the next days lessons with Remus and Sirius they probed for answers. The aunt had been absolutely impervious to wheedling the evening before. They had not a lot more luck with the dogfather and the wolf. They did learn that there would be a live fire exercise testing light sabers against Dementors and that their help would most emphatically not be needed to conduct that exercise.

Slumped shoulders, pouts, stamping feet, whinging, puppy dog eyes, nothing worked.

The next night, long after midnight, Dumbledore and Moody entered the Ministry. The guard never remembered seeing them. They made their way to DMLE where a Dementor was always present in case someone was in need of a fast kiss. Alastor kept watch on the corridor as Albus walked confidently toward the Dementor. Just as confidently the Dementor moved towards Albus. Albus was an old man and had his share of demons lurking. If a Dementor could be said to be happy, this Dementor was, a soul like the Headmasters would be a feast indeed.

The thing of darkness paid no heed to the snap hiss of a golden blade leaping into being. The eyes of the Headmaster glowed as the blade bisected the Dementor and its cloak. There was a rushing of spirits fleeing and a shriek that faded away into some far distance. The pieces of the cloak lay on the corridor floor. Albus turned to Moody, eyes glowing with power. "Old friend, we shall do a great service to the world in a few days time." He banished the remains of the Dementor's clothing.

Harry never did get a full report of the meeting between his aunts and the Headmaster when he got permission for her presence at the attack against Azkaban. Whenever she mentioned it eyes would narrow and nostrils would pinch. It was a very near run thing, the closest thing you had ever seen.

Hermione got to be present while the Professor convinced her parents to let her go to war.

"Please sit Headmaster, Hermione had told us something of your school, it is good to have you here to answer some questions we have." Dumbledore accepted his tea from Emma and smiled, relaxing into his chair.

"She is the finest student to come to us in many years. I can recall very few her equal and none her better." Dan was watching Hermione with a glow of pride, she did seem worried for some reason though. "What brings you here Professor?" Dan was not given to the beating about of bushes. "I must ask your permission to take your daughter into deadly danger."

The room was very quiet. The silence stretched. Emma coughed. "Pardon Headmaster? Deadly danger? What possible reason would you have?" Albus nodded and sipped his tea, "I have been told by a phoenix that her presence is necessary for our success." "A bird? You want to take our 13 year old daughter into danger because a bird brain said so?" Albus laughed. "It does seem ridiculous does it not? Perhaps I should ask Fawkes to explain himself."

Phoenix fire flared in the very nicely appointed sitting room, glaringly out of place. Fawkes circled the room singing and landed on Dan's shoulder. He preened Dan's hair for a moment and sang. Dan could never say what exactly passed between them, just that he was convinced that Hermione's help was essential. If he must, he could be present. He wouldn't have been impressed except that Fawkes made it clear to him what was at risk. This coming struggle would prevent the world plunging into chaos for a time longer than Fawkes could see. Fawkes moved to Emma and crooned to her for many long minutes. Her face slowly grew more and more worried. For a moment her shoulders slumped. Then she straightened and looked at her husband. They nodded. Emma spoke for them.

"We will accept that Fawkes is telling the truth. Hermione is needed in the coming battle. You will accept that we will go into that battle with her. We will not stay behind as our little girl goes to war." Dumbledore was adamant. "I can not allow that, you haven't the skills to protect yourself, you would be a burden to the fighters, dividing their efforts to protect you as well as to accomplish our goal."

Hermione was the one to break the deadlock. "Headmaster they are trained medical professionals. I am sure that Madam Pomfrey could

use trained assistants for any casualties that come in." So it was agreed that the Grangers would be with Poppy and the girls with Dumbledore. The next day the Grangers went on sabbatical and began to train with Poppy in emergency medical healing.

Dobby and Limpy were spending long hours training with the girls in swordsmanship. Remus, Harry and the two elves had gone to Ollivander's shop just after the elves were unbound and were able to convince the wandmaker to sell the elves wands. He had refused until they had revealed themselves in their true form. Having seen Dobby and Limpy he knew they were not house elves. The purchase was quickly made. Harry created light sabers for them before the end of the day. Harry and Hermione were shocked when they found the elves as quick and strong as they were, and better at popping in dueling practice. The girls took their lumps and worked harder, bringing their years of practice into the fight.

It was Alastor that demanded the fighters practice together. They were going into a fight with untested weapons and untried warriors. He worked them mercilessly until they were a unit. They would be between two and three dozen combatants. They would have a large numerical superiority over the Auror's present. There were literally hundreds of Dementors to contend with.

The plan was fairly simple. Albus and Bill Weasley would lay down anti portkey and anti apparition wards just outside of the wards the Ministry had in place. Moody assumed that the Ministry would attempt to reinforce the Auror's before the battle ended. They needed to cut off any reinforcements from reaching the area. Once the wards were in place the assault team would ride brooms to the island and subdue the Auror's. The guards would be portkeyed far from the area or to medical help as required. The Death Eaters would be stunned in their cells and portkeyed to Dumbledore's holding cells. The combatants would be engaging the Dementors during the entire assault, with their patronus and their light sabers. They intended to herd the Dementors with the patronus into a thicket of saber blades.

Thank you for reading. If anyone would like to beta?

Lucius slid through Europe like the flu. The Muggle security forces were looking for him after he had lost his temper so badly outside of Prague and killed some border police and some Aurors who responded. He showed on camera but muggles sent to bring him in became oblivious to him when they caught sight of him. Coordination between the various security forces across magical and muggle bureaucracies was byzantine to the point of complete absurdity.

He found wizards as his Master required. That was the easy part. Rumor of good pay for someone willing to cast the Unforgivables had arrived long before Lucius ever did weighed down with the fat sacks of Voldemort's gold. The difficult part was finding wizards willing to fight in magical Britannia for the Dark Lord. It had not gone unnoticed that the free Death Eaters had disappeared over the course of the past few years until the most powerful of them, Lucius himself, had fled the country after being chased from his manor by a noted light family. His credence and his Lords were at an all time low. Large amounts of gold were required to offset the perception that the forces of the Dark were looking at an uphill fight in magical Britannia.

Lucius was more than ready to provide enough gold to secure the wizards the Dark Lord required. Malfoy loved spending the Dark Lord's gold. The Malfoy fortune was locked up tight after the family had fled Britain, an excuse he was happy to give to the rat formerly known as Wormtail. The Dark Lord's eyes had glowed very red indeed as he gave up the details to his vault. Malfoy was sure he would have been killed for suggesting that Voldemort use his own money to hire wands if he hadn't been slippery enough to have manoeuvred the Dark Lord into an Unbreakable Vow to not harm him or his.

Lucius had gathered the mercenaries in a small town on the English Channel to meet their commander. They numbered nearly forty souls. A ragtag mismatched lot, nervous and distrustful as they waited, all with backs to the wall and eyes on the exits. Wormtail entered the room, the wind swirling his travelling cloak about him, his eyes glowing a faint red. Men straightened in position and regarded him carefully. Mostly they were just brutes, looking for easy gold and willing to kill for it. Some few were looking for a more permanent working relationship with the once and future Dark Lord. Those few were not overly impressed with this particular incarnation

of evil. The guy was weak; they all sensed it. He was just a bit more than a squib.

One of them, larger and dumber than the rest asked "So what's the job then governor? You need a bit of the dirty done I hear and will pay well, but it's details we haven't been hearing. I needs to know a bit more before I makes up me mind." Voldemort gave a small wave with his wand. Heavy wards slammed into place to prevent apparition. A massively loud voice announced that they had seconds to exit the building before it was destroyed.

Voldemort found himself at the ends of a small forest of wands. "Gentlemen, it is time we depart. I have taken steps to ensure your participation in my task. You may stay here and face the authorities, or take one of these portkeys. I look forward to seeing you at our destination when we will continue this most entertaining discussion."

Lord Voldemort dumped a small mound of port keys onto the table in the center of the room. "You have one minute to choose, then this building will cease to exist along with any wizard still in it." Lucius and Voldemort vanished in a swirl of color. Heavy spells impacted the sealed doors splintering them.

There was a mad scramble for portkeys. Some were slow or unlucky and were still in the room at the end of the minute. The Ministry of France was never able to ascertain exactly how many died in the massive explosion that claimed the lives of four of their operatives.

They were a very disgruntled mob as they arrived at the deserted farm in the far north of Scotland. A few attempted to curse the Dark Lord. While he did not have his old power, he did have his old knowledge of the Dark Arts and duelling. He killed them slowly. The rest were convinced their best chance was to go through with the plan, whatever the plan was, and hope to escape after the fight.

They drilled for their mission for several days, broom practice and duelling skills. Rewards were never given but punishment was plentiful. Remembering the suffering of the others that had defied the little red eyed man, the thugs held their peace.

Lucius was once again at his cousin Jorge's home. Narcissa seemed less than pleased that he had returned, normal for her, and

very much less than pleased that she would remain in her current state for the foreseeable future.

"You have found the Dark Lord and he is embodied again is that not so?" Lucius sipped the excellent claret and nodded.

"Then why are we here?" There were few things that truly amused Lucius, but the thought of Voldemort's frustration with the limits imposed on him by his current body really did tickle Malfoy. He didn't smirk, he grinned.

"His incarnation is somewhat less than he had hoped it would be. He has possessed Wormtail. Pettigrew was never more than average, now he has extraordinary knowledge but still little power." As he had imagined Narcissa had more to say.

"He will gain power, and quickly, if the husk he inhabits now does not serve his purpose he will find another that will. You have made a deadly error Lucius." Then he let her know the extent of his Slytherin cunning.

"Voldemort has sworn an Unbreakable Vow while in spirit form to do no harm to me or mine." As schooled in poise under pressure as she was, this was too much. She burst into laughter.

"We are free of him. I never thought the day would come!" Lucius raised one eyebrow ever so slightly, cool to her enthusiasm.

"I am, and also you so long as you are mine." Delicious to see the fear creep into her eyes.

"Have a care husband; you play a dangerous game with one who has never lost." Lucius was unclear if she meant him or his Lord. He bowed as he exited himself from her chambers and entered his son's rooms.

"Draco, I am considering you gaining some experience in the service of the Dark Lord." His son, curled in an armchair before a low fire straightened to his feet.

"I do not care to gain that experience father. The Dark Lord will fail. I do not wish to align myself with him." Ordinarily Lucius would be

whipping the boy for his insolence before he had finished his sentence.

"Why do you believe he will fail?" Draco watched his father's long pale hands fondle his cane, the cane that hid his wand and a sword.

"He will fail because he is insane. Rumors have reached us here - Uncle Jorge has kept us informed with what he thinks we should know." Draco took a pace to the fire, poked at it with an iron. Both of them were aware that Draco still held the iron.

"The information we have is almost nothing, the information we don't have is more interesting. There is no rumor of the Dark Lord's return. Word of your hiring mercenaries for some action in Scotland has reached us. Nothing about the return of the Dark Lord." He glanced at his father.

"You say he is returned. If he has it did not go well." Lucius nodded and gestured for his son to continue. "The only targets worth anything to him in Scotland are Hogwarts and Azkaban. Hogwarts is beyond him. He is going to storm Azkaban. His forces are a few hired wands, you, and himself in a weakened state. Does he still have the power to control the Dementors?"

Lucius pondered that thought. The Dementors were the key to Azkaban. Perhaps in this coming action a Malfoy would not risk the vanguard.

"And his insanity?" Draco swelled with pride; his father was listening to him, listening to him concerning something of vital importance to the Malfoys. "That he would try this plan at all is insane unless he knows he can control the Dementors. How strong is he?" Lucius snorted.

"You might beat him if you fought carefully." Malfoy nodded to his son, spun on his heel and left Draco to his imagination. The boy was growing up, time to inflate his ego. The deflation would be all the more delicious.

Voldemort and Lucius met late that night, the night before the raid. "Lucius are you prepared?"

"Yes Lord, I am ready." The red eyed rat stared at Malfoy.

"You have doubts." Lucius nodded.

"My Lord, the Dementors. They are the key to this battle. Can you control them? I know that I cannot, certainly not the numbers at the prison."

"The thing you do not say Lucius is that you think yourself the better wizard, and if you are unable then I must be as well. If I had not made that damnable vow I would kill you for your presumption. We will attack tomorrow night as planned. I will control the Dementors as planned. You will lead our forces against the Aurors as planned." Lucius smirked a little.

"If harm should come to me tomorrow my Lord, will your vow not be invoked? I think Algernon would be suitable to lead the men against the Aurors." Lucius enjoyed the hissing of the Dark Lord. It went on for quite a while. Malfoy assumed that he was being cursed in parseltongue.

"Inform Algernon he will lead the men. I will see to the Dementors." Lucius bowed himself from the room.

The mercenaries had trained hard for the past weeks; they had grown used to one another. None were friends but none were enemies. They were hired wands with a job to do. None of them expected their employer to take any pains to see they survived, that was the mercenaries' job. They looked at the plans with an eye for the times that they would decide to push ahead or not. The best time to decide about a fight was before it started. They would see the Dementors under control before any other fighting happened. Just the news that they were going to storm Azkaban had made the fees high enough that this would be the last job for most of them. A few had left when the objective was revealed, wanting no part in the attempt. All of the ones who left had spent some time at the prison. No money would tempt them to go near the Dementors again.

Algernon was the biggest, the meanest and the dumbest, so he spoke for the mercs.

"My Lord, you better have them Dementors handled when we get there or we don't get there. We aren't going in unless we can see them clear of the island, just so you know."

The Dark Lord had hissed and spat for minutes in his frustration. He burned for his old power when the world feared his name. True he had defeated two of the mercenaries. He had also been exhausted and wounded quite badly. Those he had fought hadn't been the best of them either. Voldemort knew his troops were measuring him to a fine ounce. If he didn't regain his power soon, his rise would be difficult indeed. The sheep might begin to think they could resist.

After the noon meal the next day Lucius rose to speak to the men. "We go in tonight after midnight. There are sleeping potions over there, take one as you leave and get some solid rest. We have a long flight and a short fight just as we drilled. Algernon will lead the combat team against the Aurors. Remember to take the Aurors down hard - no stunning. We don't want to fight them again. We should portkey our captives away without problems. As back up remember to bring the harnesses for your brooms. The three of you putting down the anti apparition and anti portkey wards will do so under my direction. The Dark Lord will handle the Dementors. Do your job fast or suffer the consequences. This time tomorrow, you're all paid and on your way. Any questions?"

Many of the men seemed worried about the small round wizard with red eyes. He was vital to their survival. If he didn't do his bit, they were all going to be kissed the next evening. Voldemort sensed their unease. "I will control the Dementors; they will come to heel when I call. Do your jobs and get your pay. Don't and things will not go well with you." By the end of his little speech it was difficult to discern his words amidst the hissing.

The Dark Lord and Malfoy watched the men file past the table and take the dreamless sleep potion before heading to their bunks. Some of their hands shook. Voldemort burned for his Death Eaters, his sworn warriors and their total obedience. He retired to his room considering his plans a final time.

Lucius kicked the mercenaries awake at midnight. He dispensed pepper up potion to them all; he needed clear heads this night. They mustered in the barn, each with their broom and carry harness, wand and whatever other weapon they favored. Algernon passed out port keys to his men once they had mounted their brooms. Lucius and the warders mounted up and got their portkeys from the

Dark Lord. They would arrive outside the Ministry wards and overlay them with their own.

The Dark Lord mounted his broom and nodded at Lucius. The ward team ported away. Voldemort nodded at the combat team a minute later and watched as they vanished in a wash of color. Finally he activated his own portkey, set to bring him into position beside the warders. He phased into being over the cold North Sea, wind wailing around him, rain lashing him. A bit to one side he could see Lucius and the ward team. He gestured the combat team forward and went to check on the warders.

"There is already a set of wards here My Lord. Someone else is attempting to storm the fortress tonight." Lucius heard a hiss that might have been "Dumbledore! Get those wards up Malfoy!" Voldemort flattened himself to his broom and raced for the dimly seen island. He passed the combat team quickly. They were in no hurry to engage until the Dementors were handled. No matter, soon the old fool would be kissed and Azkaban would be his, he would have his choice of powerful wizards instead of this squib he hated being in, perhaps he would use Dumbledore as his next incarnation. He laughed relishing the idea. Voldemort streaked on, smiling as he neared his victory. He could see flashes of light, magical combat at the fortress. The Dementors were gathered there. He felt his wards come up. Azkaban was isolated now, soon it would be his.

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The waiting was always the worst. Moody stumped back and forth his eye darting in all directions. The Combat teams were assembled in the Great Hall of Hogwarts checking each others gear.

Alastor glanced at the little girls the phoenix said had to come with them if they were to succeed. Dumbledore had made some strange demands over the course of their long fight against the Dark, but this one topped them all. These children should never be near a battlefield. Moody stumped and fumed. To protect them he had skewed the makeup of his teams, placing most of his best fighters in one team, his. Albus, the girls, the elves, and himself were one team, they were the reserve. The Weasleys were another team, the parents with Bill and Charlie. The teachers were another, McGonagall, Flitwick, Snape, Sprout. The aurors he had the least worry over. They were familiar with the target. Shackbolt, Tonks, Black and Lupin. Black worried the hell out of him. Moody knew he would be difficult to control in the fight so he paired him with the active aurors and his friend who could be trusted to stun Black and port him out if necessary. The other groups were seasoned fighters from the first war. All good fliers and capable of casting a Patronus. Nearly forty souls would go in harms way this evening.

The Grangers, Minerva, and Poppy stood with the girls all of them holding hands, eyes glistening with held back tears. Hedwig and Athena sat on their mistresses shoulders, preening hair and cooing softly. They had all said all there was to say, so the final goodbyes were quick. "I love you, come back safe"

Poppy having addressed all three of them turned and hurried to check her supplies. She would not cry. The Grangers hugged their daughter, then Harry and shook Minerva's hand. One did not hug McGonagall. "Come back safe Hermione, Harry. Don't take chances." The girls nodded. They squirming in place, ready for it to start, this waiting was intolerable.

The battle plan was simple. Portkey to a launch point close to the island, get on their brooms and head in. Albus and Bill Weasley would set wards against apparition and portkeys just outside the ministry wards while the rest of the group went in to stun the Aurors on guard and port them out. Albus was able to make the portkeys

that would bypass the Ministry wards and their own. They would begin herding the Dementors into a killing field as soon as they hit land. They would clear the outside and work down through the fortress. At the bottom were the high security cells, the cells with the inner circle Death Eaters, their secondary objective. It seemed simple, they had a superior force and weapons, it should work. Moody had a bad feeling about this operation. He always had a bad feeling about an operation. Sighing he sipped from his hip flask and checked his equipment again.

Albus stood. "My friends we are ready." Everyone stood and grabbed their team ropes. "Remember what you fight for, fear not what you fight against. Three, two, one, GO!" The teams vanished in a swirl of color.

Poppy looked at the Grangers and her other assistants. "Now the hard part, we wait." She had trained several house elves in field medicine, there were a few other healers in the Order, and she had the Grangers, whose abilities she had grown to admire. They fussed over their supplies and worried.

The teams mounted up as soon as they were able. Within a minute they were moving over the ocean towards the fortress. The ward team streaked ahead of the others, Bill, Albus, the girls and the elves. Bill and Albus worked so quickly that the other teams never slowed, the wards were up in seconds. Dobby and Limpy added a ward of their own to the surprise of the wizards.

Harry and Hermione shone in the moonlight, their armor a soft golden glow. Dobby rode at Harry's knee, his true form showing tall and fierce. "What ward did you put up Dobby?"

"It will weaken the powers of Darkness." The elf stated straight ahead, eyes glittering in the moonlight wrapped in a strange power. Limpy rode on the outside of Hermione. She was singing in a clear voice like wind chimes. Harry couldn't understand the words. Hermione was bound to be positively bulging with questions when this was over.

Fawkes flamed into being over them with Hedwig and Athena in his train. Harry felt grateful for the company but wished Hedwig had stayed in a safe place. Fawkes joined Limpy in her song and slowly the lot of them; elves, witches, wizards, and owls joined the song as

they could. The island was close now, Harry could see the Dementors massing and heading for them.

They flew on singing. They would meet the Dementors over the open water, that had not been the plan but the evil ones had responded more quickly than Albus had imagined they would.

Albus stood in the brooms braces, his robes whipping in the wind of his passing and laughed. His voice echoed over the water. "Come then! It is a sword day, a red day, and a new dawn rising!" His gold saber snapped and hissed into being as he cast his phoenix patronus.

Harry would keep that image to the end of her days. Dumbledore, beard and robes whipping, his eyes and saber lit he laughed as he entered a desperate fight against evil. All around them patronus sprang into the night air. They formed a funnel around the Dementors who ignored it intent on their prey. Those without light sabers dropped back as the wielders rode on. They would maintain the patronus funnel and watch for any assault from a different direction.

Sirius surged to the front, he had stopped singing. His voice was a pure animal howl of vengeance and blood lust. Fawkes shot ahead and circled him.

The attackers slowed and waited for the Dementors. They were nearly to shore. The mass of Dementors facing them seemed limitless, hundreds, maybe a thousand. No one had ever heard one speak before that night. No one had ever heard one laugh. That sound, the sound of a Dementors laughter would echo in nightmares for the rest of their lives. The patronus faltered and flickered. Few could hold their patronus against a single Dementor, but against hundreds? Fear grew and with it uncertainty.

"Pull back away from them, leave them to the sabers, pull back and keep your patronus herding them." The Headmaster's voice was strong and calm, easily heard despite the wind and wave. His troops rearranged themselves as he had directed. Sirius was roaring something inarticulate as the first of the Dementors reached for him. His blood red blade snapped through the creature, its severed halves dropped to the cold sea. The Dementors paused for a beat. Fawkes gave a screaming challenge while Sirius urged his broom

forward. Sirius was blind to anything but the Dementors. Lupin swooped in on his right, blade out, howling his defiance. His pack was fighting, his brother in danger. Dumbledore and Moody raced to join them before they were encircled, with the girls and the elves in chevron formation. The fighters formed a loose globe of blades facing outwards just as the Dementors threw themselves forward at them.

Limpy and Dobby still sang their elven war song. The Dementors seemed to be focused on the elves. Sabers slashed as quickly as the hands holding them could move them. Dementors tumbled into the sea giving voice again. They could not only laugh, they could scream. Sirius screamed with them.

Slowly the saber team moved forward towards the shore. They would have been lost, quickly overwhelmed if it hadn't been for Fawkes and the elves. Whatever song they shared heartened the fighters, gave them an endurance that wasn't natural to them. They found they could bear their worst memories in the certain knowledge that beyond this life was another better life. A life without loss, a life of joy. And if they went to that life fighting this good fight who could call them anything but blessed?

The saber team grounded and began to march to the fortress. The Dementors pulled back, their initial savage assault beaten. They had lost dozens to the light sabers. Dementors were not beings that counted their loss. They had only their lust for souls. Before them were souls that were beyond price or imagining. Unbound elves, maiden warriors of the goddess, the tempered souls of the Order of the Phoenix. Never had the Dementors been offered such a feast. They would have their way this day as their nature demanded.

The Dementors withdrew to the fortress. They would draw their enemy in and separate them then overwhelm them in the narrow spaces.

The forces of the Light came to ground not a little tired. It had been horrific to watch, to see the gleaming armor of the girls disappear in a cloud of evil, to hear the Dementors laugh, to hear Sirius go insane. The shield team would have fled if they hadn't heard the clear elven battle hymn, giving them heart and strength.

The girls took off their helms and killed their blades. Dumbledore conjured hot chocolate for everyone, a very large serving indeed, and ordered that they drink it. Sirius stood pole straight staring at the fortress, unblinking. Occasionally he would growl. It was Hermione who approached him finally, a cup of hot chocolate in her hand. Firmly she wrapped his hand around it. Her voice was very loud, not quite shouting as she spoke to him. "You will have your revenge. If you will have anything after you must decide now. Do not become the next Dementor Sirius, do not become them. You will lose Harry." Sirius blinked finally and looked at her. His eyes were infinitely cold.

"You presume to tell me what to do little girl?" Harry stepped to her side and grasped her hand.

"She does. She tells everyone what to do. Haven't you noticed?" Harry was very matter of fact, very dry. Remus barked a laugh and pulled his wand. He turned Sirius bright pink, and dressed him in a tutu. Slowly laughter built in the group until people were on their knees with tears in their eyes.

Sirius huffed. "Always laughing at the dog. I do think it is a form of jealousy." He crushed the girls to him in a fierce hug. "Remind me again if I slip will you pups?"

Harry shook her head. "No Sirius, don't slip. If we lose here, we see my mom and dad. If we win, we rid the world of those creatures. So we can't lose can we? Just relax and enjoy the fight. And drink your hot chocolate."

They rested another five minutes then began their march on the fortress. Minerva walked holding Harry's hand, Harry held Hermione's. Minerva kept a steady stream of invective going as they walked.

"How I ever let myself be talking into having you two here is quite beyond me. I shall have to ask Poppy to check for compulsion charms. I would send you back if I could make you go. I am sure there is not a strand of hair on my head that isn't gray. You two with your skiing and your goddess will be the end of me. I would rather have the Weasley twins for the summer than the trouble the pair of you are capable of. I don't understand how girls so young can cause so much mischief that it takes the full Order of the Phoenix to sort it out!"

As one Harry and Hermione wheeled around and hugged Auntie Minerva hard. They resumed walking in silence, with watery eyes each holding one of her hands.

The Auror guard met them just outside the fortress. The Warden spoke first "Dumbledore?" The Headmaster nodded.

"Warden we have come into possession of a means of destroying Dementors. We intend to rid the world of them. We certainly mean you no harm, it would be a great service if you and your men would consent to being portkeyed away."

"I have my duty sir. I will not abandon my post. I am the Warden of Azkaban. Not a happy title, but a responsibility I take seriously. I will stay." His guards all nodded agreement.

"Will you fight with us? Or failing that will you stand aside as we fight? We mean no harm to your charges, only the Dementors."

"I can do neither sir, I must oppose you. It is my duty." Dumbledore nodded sadly. A vast wash of red engulfed the guards, stunners launched from many of the Order. The stunned Guards of Azkaban got portkeys and were gone in a whirl of color.

Alastor muttered to Albus "That went as well as it could have, Horatio always was a stickler for duty." Dumbledore nodded.

The Order entered the Fortress making its way to the top of the facility. The elves still sang softly while the birds rode the shoulders of their familiars. The Order began to move down through the fortress, floor by floor, clearing them and leaving guards behind to warn of any flanking by the Dementors. They were unopposed until they reached the ground floor with its many entrances. The mass of the Dementors waited there.

The Order members in the rear were able to cast their patronus to protect the saber wielders in the vanguard. Once again the wolf and the Grim stood in the forefront. They stood to either side of an archway the Order entered through. Quickly the Order sealed each exit with a patronus, all but the stairs to the lower level. There was a second of echoing silence. Limpy gave a loud battle cry in her own language and lit her saber. Dobby and the girls followed, and the

four marched forward between the wolf and the Grim singing. There was a massive surge of Dementors across the huge open hall towards the brightly shining figures, each so small, golden and silver. The girls called their staffs and grounded them sharply calling out a name forgotten in their world. They were beloved of elves and blood bonded to them, some things were given to them to know that others never would. At the grounding of the goddess staffs a blast of light tore through the room. The staffs stood on their own pulsing with an energy that sang of hope and love. The sabers snapped and hissed as the girls and the elves used all their skills to stay up and fighting. The four were in a square and any that got in reach of their blades perished. Slowly the press eased as the rest of the blade wielders cut their way to the girls. Dozens of Dementors were cleaved, shrieking as they passed over at last. Maddened beyond endurance by the carnage the Dementors burst through an exit to the ground floor courtyard. The four stood for a moment panting amid a mound of putrid corpses, the blood that was not blood pooling at their feet. Harry and Hermione collapsed to their knees, sick with the destruction of even so twisted a life.

"After them! Keep the other openings sealed!" Albus marched into the courtyard with Fawkes screaming war on his shoulder. The Weasleys were on the heels of the Headmaster, closely followed by the rest of the Order. At his side was his companion of many battles Alastor, along with Remus and Sirius. For the first time the Dementors felt fear. They had no power here, their magic was overcome by the phoenix, the elves and the warrior maidens. They cowered against the walls as the lightsabers hissed through their ranks winnowing them, reaving them.

The Dark Lord entered the fight at this moment of loss. He flew into the courtyard and landed among the Dementors, arm raised, hand clenched and screaming. "By the Light in the Dark I call you to battle! You will not falter! Take their souls!" Darkness and evil pulsed from him, power flowed from his hand. The Dementors found themselves strong again, and determined to feast on those before them.

In a flash Albus stunned Remus and Sirius. He levitated them into the great hall the Order had just left. "Back to the Hall, we will defend the doorway!"

In close rank the wielders of the swords moved back as the Dementors pressed forward. Still the elves sang as they slew and Fawkes circled singing. The girls hadn't breath to sing, their blades danced and weaved. Earlier in the fight cleaving a limb from an opponent had taken them out, now the Dementors pressed on regardless. They had to be killed to be stopped. At the Dementors back stood Wormtail with glowing red eyes, his arm upraised and fist clenched around some source of dark strength. Whatever magic he held it drove the Dementors to a frenzy. In the Hall Minerva enervated Remus and Sirius. She hurriedly forced chocolate on them and had them move to where the goddess staves were pulsing with clean pure magic. The dog and the wolf regained some color and life came up in their eyes.

Wormtail laughed and screamed. "Take them, take them all, prisoners as well, today my children you feast!" He spotted Remus and Sirius. "The dog and the wolf! Take them! Do not fail me this day!"

The Dementors gathered in the courtyard now scarcely more than a hundred. These were the oldest of them, the ones who had lived since their making, the ones directly sworn to the Light in the Dark. They could feel its dark power giving them strength and the courage to fight on against the damn glowing blades. Their lord spoke at last. "Our strength is not of arm, but the sickness we bring to the soul. We will sicken them one by one and kiss them as they come to us, let us call him who was with us those years."

They bent their magic on Sirius; calling to him, knowing his mind, seeking to drown him in despair. He tried to resist. His feet shuffled forward as his eyes glazed.

Harry was heartsick from the carnage. What they did was what was needed. But the sheer amount of slaughter was horrifying. She would never be clean of the blood she had spilled this day. Dully she watched as her godfather slumped towards the courtyard and death. A soft sigh was all she had to give. She turned to Hermione and kissed her softly. "I love you." It was the barest of whispers. Hermione's eyes lost their glazed look as her hand came to her lips. She nodded at Harry, smiling and certain. "I love you Harry."

Harry picked up her staff and walked to the courtyard entrance. Cold was the laughter of the Dementors as they felt Sirius weaken and move more quickly to them.

Harry's blade snapped into life, she spun in a circle like a discus thrower and released her saber. Spinning it shot across the courtyard. Before any could react the glowing blade had severed the upraised arm of Wormtail. Harry called a simple spell just as Sirius came up behind her. "Accio Light in the Dark".

The gem shot across the courtyard and into Harry's hand. The dark power it had been putting out ceased instantly as Harry began to scream, her hand smoking. Sirius caught her as she slumped to the floor. The Headmaster was in a fury. "At them now! No quarter! He led the grim eyed charge into the courtyard. The blades of the wielders rose and fell leaving only carcasses behind. There was no singing now, this was not a work of glory, this was a fight to extinction. It was Sirius who took the last head.

The Lord of the Dementors had picked up Harry's saber, still lit. Sirius charged him howling. Remus gave a growl and streaked at Wormtail. Red eyed or not there was going to be one less rat this night. Albus and Alastor directed the Order in the final push.

Remus raced at the rat. Faint with pain Voldemort pulled his wand into his left hand and sent Remus a killing curse, he had no time for mere werewolves. With this last skirmish he could kill Dumbledore while the Headmaster was busy directing the end of the battle.

Remus had been a beater when he was in Hogwarts and those reflexes served him well that night. He swung the saber perfectly. The killing curse shot back at the astonished Voldemort, hitting him dead center in the chest. Without a sound the body of Wormtail collapsed in the dirt.

Dumbledore was frantic. The Dark Lord's soul was unbound and close to so many he loved. In their battle frenzy many of them would be vulnerable. Fawkes gave a piercing call and burst into flame along with Hedwig and Athena. The huge pulse of light magic from the sacrifice of Hedwig, Athena and Fawkes drove the soul of the Dark Lord off of the island. He drifted, mere vapor again, losing will if not coherence. Formless he was adrift and unaware.

Sirius circled the Lord of the Dementors, hungry for the fight. The Dementor held back, aware that very soon he would be the last of his kind. The Dementor would have fled but now that was impossible. He was hemmed on all sides by the Order, their patronus, their glowing damned blades. Perhaps though he could take one more before his end.

In the old speech he heard Limpy. "You were one who bound us. As has been foretold that will now end. Do not think to take this one with you, it will not be allowed. He has demanded you fight him as a matter of honor. You will do so. You may kill him but you will not possess him. Your rule is ended."

Dobby drew a silver knife across his palm and drizzled blood onto the Light in the Dark, followed by Limpy. Hermione lifted her staff and brought the iron shod end of it crashing onto the gem. It shattered with a huge blast of light, knocking the Lord of the Dementors to the ground. When he rose, he rose as a man. He was tall and strong, a fell man, grim of visage with malice in his eyes. Harry stood next to Hermione, cradling her burnt hand. She lifted her staff and called "Accio saber". Her lightsaber spun across the courtyard into her hand. She killed the blade.

"You will have to find another sword, mine is sworn to the Light."

Sirius stood waiting, a Grim indeed. Evil the Lord of the Dementors was, but never a coward. He reached into the shadows and a black blade came into his hand. The elves hissed and stepped back. The Headmaster cast a spell that caused the courtyard to glow with an even light, Sirius would be able to see during his fight. The two met with a rush.

Harry had expected the lightsaber to cleave the sword of the Dementor, but the black sword withstood the contact. A deep ringing came as the blades met again and again. Sirius threw himself into the fight with all the passion of a man seeking revenge for a dozen years in hell. His opponent fought with precision and coldness. The best the Dementor could hope for was to take one more life before his ended.

The Dementor held the first rush and began to press Sirius back, testing his skills. Sirius was a good swordsman, but not great. His opponent was great. The Dementor began to toy with him. He was

passing opportunities to push the fight forward and allowing Sirius to recover. Sirius began to lose his concentration and was cut twice in quick succession. Remus watched and worried. Finally Remus shouted over the ringing of the black sword and the snapping hum of the saber. "For God's sake man, your bright pink and in a tutu, how can you lose?"

Sirius heard his old friend and had to laugh. He smiled like an idiot, realizing that there was just no damn way he was going to give the wolf the satisfaction of dying in a tutu. There was a sudden flurry of blows and Sirius was on one knee looking up at his opponent as the Dementor raised the black sword for a cleaving stroke. Sirius took him off at the knees while twisting away from the descending blade. The Dementor screamed as the cauterized stumps of his legs hit the dirt of the courtyard. Sirius surged to his feet taking off the Dementors sword arm. The final stroke took off the last Dementor's head.

Harry had a portkey on her godfather before he had taken another breath. She hugged him hard and activated the portkey that would take him to Hogwarts. She hugged Remus and sent him after the dog. She was surprised when she felt the sensation of a port key and saw the swirl of color. Some sneak had sent her to the infirmary.

Albus wrapped his hand in cloth and picked up the black sword. He hated to touch it, it exuded evil. He conjured a box for it and set it inside, sealing the box and sending it along to Hogwarts with a scrap of parchment asking that it be put in his office.

The rest of the Order moved through the prison fortress porting out the Death Eaters to their new home and reassuring the rest that while they would remain prisoners, they would never have to suffer from a Dementor again. Those who were still sane enough to have reasoning abilities were profoundly grateful.

Algernon with his men watched from afar as Voldemort landed and rallied the Dementors. They watched as the Dementors surged across the courtyard driven by whatever magic Voldemort was wielding. They saw the glowing blade take off Voldemort's upraised arm. They saw the battle pause. Suddenly the fighters inside erupted into the courtyard and Voldemort was dead, hit by a rebounding killing curse. They saw the Dementors falling until only one was left.

Without a word the mercenaries and Lucius turned and flew towards the land. They landed and apparated to the training facility they had used. There were several quick fights over the gold. Worry over Aurors arriving held the fighting to a minimum. Algernon had been careful to mention that possibility on the flight back. He had seen Lucius smirk. Definitely an irritating man.

Within minutes the place was empty of people and easily transported valuables. Last out the door was Lucius Malfoy. He fussed about and watched his forces melt away, then returned to the building. Lucius knew that Voldemort kept a large supply of gold hidden from them all. He would have that gold before he escaped to the continent again. It took him most of an hour to find the gold, so much gold he had to cast featherlight charms on the crates and shrink them. He sauntered out of the building into a killing curse that took him right in the chest. Algernon searched Lucius and pocketed the gold. There was a reason he acted dumb. It always helped to be underestimated. He left the body of Lucius to cool in the early morning air.

As he flew away he wondered if the Weasleys would pay for the information that Lucius was dead. The Weasleys were too well connected at the Ministry to not hear the news, although with them openly storming the Ministry's prison a lot of things were going to change. Algernon hurried for the coast. No matter how it fell out, it couldn't improve his position. He was set for life, all he had to do was keep what he had and keep quiet. There was some honor among thieves, anyone who rid the world of Dementors was not someone he wanted to fight, or to try to blackmail. If the Ministry was going to learn who was in on the assault it wouldn't be from Algernon.

The Order of the Phoenix returned to the Great Hall at Hogwarts. Sirius was the injured the worst, the wounds from the black sword resisted Poppy's efforts to close them. There was a small mountain of chocolate that was disappearing at a phenomenal rate.

Limp and Dobby stood off to the side, before them were gathered the elves of Hogwarts. They were unbound now and free. They sang and talked to one another in a language no one else knew, not even the Headmaster. They were tall and slim, if human they would be skinny. They had a grace and elegance that was otherworldly. Albus

looked on the elves with great interest. The world had been reshaped this day and he was most interested in knowing how. Every few seconds elves would pop into the Great Hall. It seemed as if every elf in magical Britannia was either at Hogwarts or headed there.

The Headmaster hurried from the Great Hall calling for his Heads of House to follow him. Minerva was reluctant to leave Harry, her hand being treated by Auntie Poppy while Hermione held the other hand. They both practiced breathing without life hanging in the balance. In the next bed Sirius was cussing out Remus for not changing him out of his tutu and reversing his pink spell.

The Heads of House and Albus met in the Headmaster's office. "My friends we have succeeded beyond what I had ever imagined today. An ages old wrong was righted and a great evil is no more. Voldemort is in spirit form, we have all his Death Eaters. These are all great things and worth the price we will have to pay."

"Fudge will not take this well. We stormed the Ministry's prison and killed all its non human guards. We may be seen as traitors. We most certainly will have a great many questions to answer to a great many people. I should very much like your opinions on our best course of action."

Minerva spoke first. "Lock down Hogwarts. We need time for this to settle out. We will not have that if Fudge has access to us. You must hurry Albus, close Hogwarts to any not already here. We can not fight the Aurors, we mustn't. Merlin only knows what the upshot of the freed elves will be."

Albus looked around the room. "Are we agreed then? We prepare for a siege?" All of them nodded. Albus stood behind his desk and placed his wand on it. He murmured some spell softly. Suddenly the air felt thick and the slamming of enormous barriers was heard at first far away, then moving closer. Finally the shutters over the window of the Headmaster's office shut out the summer day.

They all heaved a sad sigh. Hogwarts was a school, to shut out the world was not to be done lightly. The teachers made their way back to the Great Hall and the rest of the Order.

Albus stood on the dais that held the teachers table. "Members of the Order, return to your homes immediately. Gather those dear to you and come back here. We will wait here to learn what consequences our actions will have in the broader world. We will provide shelter to any elf that wishes it. We have shaken the magical world today and must expect that we did not do so at no cost to ourselves."

Limpy stood forward from the growing crowd of elves. "Headmaster perhaps elves could accompany the members of the Order. We are able to pass the wards of Hogwarts and the Ministry. We can assure that only those who should be here are, and that none who should be here are not."

Albus bowed to her. Sometime in the fight she had become regal, a princess. "It would be most greatly appreciated Elder." Limpy paused a bit as if surprised at the title fitting her. A faint smile graced her ethereal features as she gave a small bow and turned to her people. A rippling series of pops sounded across the Hall as elves took the members of the Order to their homes.

Many thanks to my kind beta nas-iiN. All mistakes are mine, all glory his.

Disclaimer: JKR and associated corporations own Harry Potter. I do not.

There was quite a party going on in the Great Hall of Hogwarts. The Order of the Phoenix had hours before destroyed the Dementors of Azkaban. House elves had been unbound as a result of the destruction of the Light in the Dark, a magical talisman that had bound the elves as servants. That same talisman held sway over the Dementors and had been Lord Voldemort's means of control in the last war. Dementors could be commanded by the talisman if one had sufficient will to stand against them. Lord Voldemort had that will no matter that he had been embodied in the husk of Peter Pettigrew.

The Dark Lord was returned to his spirit form when Pettigrew was hit with a rebounding killing curse. Sirius Black had defeated the Lord of the Dementors in single combat. History, despite the best efforts of all witnesses, would try to gloss over Sirius being bright pink and dressed in a tutu during their epic sword fight.

Hundreds of freed elves were swarming the Great Hall as they wondered what came next for them. A large mixed group of Order members and elves were in the kitchens with Molly Weasley cooking for whoever might like food.

The Headmaster sat before the fire in a comfortable chair, listening to the increasingly irate shouting of Cornelius Fudge, Minister for Magic. Dumbledore was enjoying himself far too much to be in the trouble he was in. Fudge had sacked him three separate times in as many minutes, each time louder than the last.

Dumbledore handed him a cup of hot chocolate through the fire nattering on that it would do the Minister a world of good. The Headmaster knew his man. Fudge ran out of steam and glared at Dumbledore. The Minister eyed the heads of House arrayed behind the Headmaster.

"Minerva, I require you to take over the position that Dumbledore has just been relieved of and to open Hogwarts immediately!"

McGonagall peered at him as if he were a homesick first year, traces of concern and sympathy on her face.

"Do you feel quite well Cornelius? You must be aware that the annihilation of the Dementors is a great victory for the Light. Will you sack the man responsible for their extinction? Why would you do that Cornelius?"

She was a canny Scot. Dumbledore has never sought office.

"Headmaster what will you do if you decide to leave Hogwarts?"

Fudge paled. The Ministry had been party to a self serving and morally corrupt bargain with the Dementors. That bargain was no longer necessary. Dumbledore's stock was bound to rise with the wizard on the street. Sacking Dumbledore after this huge victory could reflect badly indeed on Fudge.

"This is most untoward Dumbledore. I shall empanel a Board of Inquiry to ascertain the facts. The Warden tells me that all the Death Eaters are gone from the high security cells. What do you have to say for yourself?"

"That is most interesting Cornelius. Misplaced your prisoners have you?"

Dumbledore leaned back enjoying the magenta color of Fudges face as it contrasted with his lime green derby.

"YOU STOLE THEM DAMN YOUR EYES!"

Dumbledore twinkled madly at him.

"I believe you are becoming overwrought Cornelius, perhaps we should speak again another time."

The old man's hand twitched and the floo connection was broken. He took a moment to laugh before he made his next call.

"Ah Madam Bones, I am glad to have found you still at your office. Quite the day we are having is it not?"

Amelia regarded him with no little ire.

"Albus you fool, you have well and truly kicked the hornets nest. I can hear Fudge from here. He seems to be getting closer. You had

better think of something. I will not have my Aurors made fools of again today. You will return Shackelbolt and Tonks to me immediately. Send Alastor along as well. What have you done with those Death Eaters? I warn you Dumbledore, you can NOT have a private prison. Return my personnel and prisoners immediately!"

Dumbledore inclined his head graciously. Madam Bones was not amused. Dumbledore was.

"There are many puzzles to be solved as a result of the days activities. I find myself in possession of the recently deceased body of Peter Pettigrew. I am at a loss to understand how he came to be at Azkaban commanding the allegiance of the Dementors by means of a talisman which also bound all house elves. Did you know of this talisman Amelia?"

Amelia Bones was not a weak woman. She did not scare. She did not bluff. Albus was very aware of her eyes shifting aside. He made an interested humming noise.

"Shall I contact the Department of Mysteries Amelia?"

The head of Magical Law Enforcement heaved a sigh and set aside a burden she had always resented having to carry.

"I knew of the talisman. It was lost to us when Rookwood defected to Voldemort in the first war. It was said to have the power to command the Dementors. I knew we were on borrowed time without the talisman. The Dementors could have left the island at any time. All that kept them there was the ease of their existence and the struggle we would have put up had they gone hunting. I did not know it bound the elves. I don't think anyone knew that."

Her face turned a bit in the fire. She made some gesture and the sound level behind her lessened immediately.

"I must have my prisoners back Dumbledore, you have no right to a private prison and you know it. You have done much good today, do not end the day with evil."

The Order had gathered around the Headmaster's chair as he spoke. They stood silent and calm. Harry and Hermione came to stand to

his immediate right, with Minerva's hands on their shoulders. Harry's right hand was neatly bandaged. Madam Bones gasped.

"Albus you did not take those children into combat against Dementors?"

His face sagged, looking every one of his years. Minerva's hands tightened convulsively on the girls shoulders.

"I did. We would have lost without them. They were required for our victory. Concerning whatever loose Death Eaters I might be able to find, what are your intentions for them?"

"Why to lock them up, and throw away the key. Certainly you don't expect them to be killed or freed? What other option is there?"

Amelia leaned to one side for a moment then returned to the fire.

"Lucius Malfoy was just discovered dead outside an abandoned farm not far from Azkaban. Do you know anything about this Dumbledore?"

He shook his head.

"No Amelia. Voldemort was present at Azkaban this past night. We arrived very shortly before he did. He had taken Pettigrew's body. It was Voldemort who used the talisman through Pettigrew. Peter was never brave enough to command their obedience. I suspect Lucius was present but managed to keep himself out of the battle. I had heard rumors of Lucius hiring mercenaries. I had thought he was recruiting help for his blood feud with the Weasleys, it seems to have been a force to take Azkaban. We were only just in time."

Amelia's face took on a haunted look as she considered Voldemort with a pack of mercenaries and his most faithful Death Eaters working with Dementors.

Dumbledore leaned forward.

"Amelia we must remove Fudge. He is incapable of preparing us for the fight. Voldemort struggles ever more frantically against his death. He has managed a physical presence at least twice in the past two years. He will continue to strive to regain a body. He came within a

throw of winning a major battle and gaining his old power. Fudge will continue to ignore the warnings and our pleas for decisive action. I know you have access to the Malfoy records. Go public with them and stand for Minister. I know it is not your ambition, precisely why you are well suited for the job. Please, don't let these children be forced into harms way when it is in your hands to prevent that."

She stared at him for a long moment.

"Do you have all the Death Eaters Albus?"

He smiled faintly.

"All that I am aware of Amelia. I will return them to you if we agree on their punishment."

"And what would that punishment be?"

"Complete oblivation of their personalities. They will be reduced to newborns and will be raised again in the hope they will make better choices. All assets beyond a comfortable living for their families seized and dispersed to their victims or to charity."

She nodded. It fit her sense of justice.

"Can you hold them until this all settles down?"

"I absolutely insist on it Minister."

She growled at him.

"Make sure to read the paper tomorrow old man."

"Ah my friends of the fifth estate. I must contact them I think. It is always good to stay ahead of events."

"Will I be surprised Dumbledore?"

He smiled and shook his head.

"No Madam you will not. You have the truth now. I intend to see it before the people."

She nodded once and the fire became just a fire again.

The girls wandered away from the fire and its hubbub of calls and chatter. They joined hands and walked among the elves. Dobby and Limpy were great among the newly risen race, it had been their blood given in battle against their oppressors that had unbound the curse. Hermione was revered as the maiden who had smashed the talisman. Harry teased her unmercifully as she accepted the graceful bows the elves gave her.

The girls made their way to the infirmary partly to see the battle between the dog and the wolf, and partly to be with Auntie Poppy and Hermione's parents. Sirius was asleep while Poppy continued to try to close his wounds.

"Is he in danger Auntie?"

Harry was proud that her voice didn't quiver. Poppy sighed softly.

"He shouldn't be. I can heal a cut like those in a second. For some reason these refuse to close. I even had that fool Lupin change his color back to normal hoping that jinx was interfering with my spells. I don't understand what keeps the wounds open. His temperature is rising also."

Hermione looked to her parents.

"What about stitches? Would those work Mum, Dad?"

Her mum answered.

"They would force the wounds closed dear however that might not be for the best. The fever worries me, If I wasn't sure the wounds were clean I would be concerned with infection. Poppy assures me the potions he is taking are effective against infections. Should we test the weapon for poisons Poppy?"

Poppy huffed a bit.

"Tes we should test the weapon. If Fawkes were here he might give Sirius some of his tears. That would heal the wounds for certain."

The girls blanched. Hedwig and Athena had burned with Fawkes to break the power of the talisman. The loss of the owls was brought home to them. The girls had stood tall in battle against the Dementors, but the loss of their loved familiars undid them. Poppy and Emma each cradled a sniffling girl. The women exchanged a look over the tops of their daughters heads. In minutes the girls were tucked in, with a final cup of hot chocolate to wash away the taste of the sleeping potion. Their mothers rescued the cups from the quietly lax fingers as the warrior maids drifted into sleep.

Slowly the castle grew quiet as Order families found quarters and settled down for the night. The elves continued their meeting, some leaving to sleep, others joining in their place. Songs and tales they put together as first one then another would remember a bit of their common heritage.

Wealthy homes across magical Britannia saw a lot of fussing. Those who had the prestige and wealth to own a house elf found that they missed their services quite badly. Many families loved their elves. What those relationships were to become was sure to be radically different than what had been. There were hard facts to face with power shifted so radically. Tall elegant beings of great poise excused themselves from their homes and made their way to Hogwarts.

The Elven Nation was gathering.

The morning edition of the Daily Prophet had a blazing headline the next day.

"DUMBLEDORE DEFEATS DEMENTORS!"

"In a daring midnight raid Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, led his paramilitary combat teams against the Dementors of Azkaban. The fight began in the airspace between the island and the mainland. The paramilitary fighters threw back the initial Dementor response and landed on the island as the Dementors regrouped on the fortress. The Auror guards garrisoned on the island marched to meet the attackers. The Warden requested that the assault team leave immediately. Dumbledore refused to cease his assault. This reporter has only admiration and sympathy for the brave men and women of the Auror Corps whose duty, never easy, was made impossible by the Headmasters attack. Dumbledore's

fighters gave no warning before stunning the Aurors and sending them to a safe location inland and continuing their deadly attack on the Dementors.

It is not known how the Headmaster was able to defeat the Dementors, thought to number over one thousand. To this reporter's best knowledge Dementors were immortal. Last night the Headmaster handed them their heads. This reporter had heard vague rumors of close quarters combat with several of the fighters wielding some form of glowing sword. Fawkes, Dumbledore's phoenix familiar, gave heart to the fighters and at the height of the battle burst into flame unleashing a powerful pulse of Light magic. The Headmaster's immediate battle group took the brunt of the combat while most of his troops herded the Dementors to their deaths by use of the Patronus Charm. The Headmaster fought alongside his former students Remus Lupin and Sirius Black as well as Professor Filius Flitwick, a noted duelist, and four unknown allies.

The battle finished with single combat between the Lord of the Dementors and Lord Sirius Black, one of the glowing blade wielders. Mr. Black is recovering from his wounds. His opponent is beyond recovery. The Daily Prophet is unable to confirm or deny that Lord Black was pink and dressed in a tutu at the time. We are also unable to confirm or deny the presence of He Who Must Not Be Named at the battle. Certainly both rumors seem unlikely."

The afternoon edition was when Madam Bones got her innings.

"MALFOY MURDERED! FUDGE ACCUSED IN BRIBERY SCANDAL!"

"Madam Amelia Bones head of Magical Law Enforcement announced today that Lucius Malfoy, noted philanthropist and pardoned Death Eater was found dead at an abandoned farm not far from Azkaban. Madam Bones asserted that Mr. Malfoy had died from a Killing Curse. Bones claims that evidence at the scene points to a training facility for group of mercenaries Mr. Malfoy had recruited from the continent. Mr. Malfoy had become involved in a blood feud with the Weasley family after Ginevra Weasley was injured at Hogwarts earlier this year. Mr Arthur Weasley of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office at the Ministry declared blood feud against Malfoy during a meeting in the Headmaster's office following Ginevra's injury. The Weasley family had succeeded in driving the

Malfoy family into hiding on the continent. Many think that Malfoy was hiring wands for a comeback attempt against the plentiful Weasleys. This reporter learned from a confidential source present at the scene that the mercenaries were intending to assault Azkaban. The Daily Prophet's source tells us that the mercenaries were actual approaching the island and saw a portion of the battle there. This hired wand even claims that the operation was led by He Who Must Not Be Named.

Whatever the truth of Mr. Malfoy's final hours it is certain that Cornelius Fudge benefited greatly from knowing Mr. Malfoy. Madam Bones revealed a long list of transactions in which Malfoy paid Fudge many thousands of galleons over the course of many years beginning the day he was acquitted of all charges concerning his activities as a Death Eater. Madam Bones has scheduled a meeting of the Wizengamot and will ask for a vote of no confidence in the leadership of Fudge. Madam Bones has scheduled a press conference immediately following the vote. She has hinted she may reveal more concerning who had their hands in Lucius Malfoy's pocket."

At Hogwarts the elves continued to gather. No one had bothered to count them before. There were thousands of them in the castle now. Hogwarts was still under lock down. The souls she harbored had rearranged the world. It was best to let her hold them safe while the dust settled.

The girls woke battle sore and heart sick. They had fought to the edge of their endurance and beyond. The Dementors had sent a frenzy of malice at them, reaching to pull them down, trying to send them beyond any hope. Harry and Hermione had aged in a fundamental way. Their bodies might be thirteen, their souls no longer were. Sirius was still fevered, his wounds still open and seeping. Red and black streaks ran up his arms, headed for his chest. Snape and Auntie Poppy tested the black sword of the Dementor Lord. The weapon was magnificent in a very dark way. They came away from it sickened by its presence. There was no poison on the blade that they could detect. The Headmaster and his heads of House examined it without touching it directly. No other substance had proven equal to the light sabers. Only this black sword could withstand the sun fury of those glowing blades. Flitwick took copies of the runes engraved on the hilt and blade. He made his way to his contacts in the goblin world, seeking answers there.

Dumbledore had recovered Fawkes after his burning Fawkes was doing well but it would be weeks before he would be able to provide tears. The girls loved Fawkes but seeing him reminded them of Hedwig and Athena, who hadn't been reborn. He chirped to them as joyful as ever obviously trying to cheer them up. He failed.

Harry and Hermione haunted the library hoping to recognize a rune, see some mention of the blade. They cycled from the infirmary, to the library, to the Great Hall where they would stay for a few minutes basking in the soothing voices of the elves.

Eventually they were chased to the Gryffindor tower to get some sleep. The place was overrun with red heads, the Weasleys were in the house.

The twins, Ron and Ginny cornered the girls for a first hand report on the fight. They had pestered their parents for details of course and hadn't had much luck.

"Oi you two, so tell! Did Sirius really fight in a tutu?"

The twins were never much for being subtle. Hermione nodded

"He did, and he was bright pink at the time."

Awe and laughter greeted this confirmation. The questions poured out after that and the girls answered in turn. The redheads wanted to see the sabers. That particular secret was out in the open. Hermione lit hers off. The twins reached to touch it. It was all shiny. Hermione hurriedly shut the blade down saving a Molly tantrum and the twins some fingers. The wheedling session that followed was epic.

"Harry! Mate! Friend of friends, best and most beautiful of all magical Britannia! When you have a sliver of idle time we would be forever in your debt should you manage to create, oh say two of those?"

Ron hit George with a sharp elbow in the ribs, Ginny got Fred.

"Or four, four would be excellent!"

Harry shivered at the idea of the twin experimenting with the sabers. Ron would take Malfoy's head the first day of school. Ginny perhaps

could be trusted with one. Hermione eyed Harry with real concern. She knew Harry really liked the Weasleys. Harry was always generous to a fault. She could see Harry struggle to say no.

"Harry perhaps we could ask Remus to include this lot in our sword training? Then if he agrees they are ready you could create them some sabers?"

For just a second Harry was her age, a broad grin on her face.

"That's perfect Mione. Guys these blades are incredibly dangerous. If Remus trains you and agrees that you are ready for them I will be happy to make them for you. It would be really cool if you could come and train with us like last year, it is really hard, but we would have fun at it. We should get Neville also huh Mione?"

The group settled in for a serious planning session of adult manipulation. Lupin hadn't agreed to run a school, only tutor Harry. Convincing him would be the first step. The old wolf was extremely busy as mayor of his little village of werewolves. They agreed the best chance was to make sure he had the time. Which meant helping him with his other obligations.

Molly had sidled over to the gang of kids in front of the fire. She knew enough to know when the volume dropped there was trouble brewing. She almost danced a jig when Harry and Hermione sidetracked her brood from immediate possession of those strange glowing blades. Bill and Charlie were planning to ask Harry about making them one each. Molly thought they could be trusted, but the twins? The Burrow would be kindling the first day. She felt inordinately proud of the children as they plotted together to attain their goal by work rather than whine.

She let them hammer out the details before she insisted they all get to bed. They trooped off with their nightcaps of hot chocolate after a token struggle. Molly would visit their rooms in an hour to make sure they actually were asleep. Those three girls could talk up a hoolie given the chance.

It was, of course, Hermione who thought of not one but two solutions to the sickness of Sirius the next day. She suggested the Drought of Living Death to hold Sirius in stasis until Fawkes could provide his healing tears as one method. Poppy vetoed the Drought, it was

borderline dark magic and Sirius suffered an overabundance of that currently.

The other solution was more difficult. It would require the blood of a unicorn, freely given. Unicorn blood was at least the equal of phoenix tears in restorative powers. The only problem was how to convince a unicorn that their help was needed.

Hagrid was easy to find, he hadn't left the Great Hall since arriving at the lockdown. He was in love with the elves. He would sit listening for hours as they discussed what they would do next and recovered what they could of their past.

Poppy, Remus, and the kids found him with a bucket of tea chatting quietly with an elf. Poppy explained their need. Hagrid shook his head.

"I ha neer seen tha happen Poppy. They only allow a maids touch, they'd not wouldn't allow a cut."

His elven companion spoke up.

"This would be to heal Sirius Black who slew the Dementor Lord?"

Hagrid nodded at him.

"Just a moment."

The elf slipped into the crowd of elves around them. Soon he was back with Dobby. Harry grabbed Dobby into a hug, happy to see her blood brother. Dobby had gotten even taller in the past day. He seemed careworn, not at all his usual exuberant self. Dobby and Limpy were the two leaders of the elven race now with much to do and no time to do it. Soon Hogwarts would open and the elves would leave her shelter. How he would guide them was a huge responsibility. But today he had a companion in arms and friend to help.

His light clear voice, so different from his servile enthusiasm, exuded confidence.

"Elves can communicate with unicorns. I will go with you to speak to them."

Hagrid seemed especially interested. It's true that unicorns only had the one horn, and generally were peaceable, unlike his favorite interesting creatures like dragons and three headed dogs. Still they were powerfully magical. Elves popped Harry, Hermione, and Hagrid into the Forbidden Forest avoiding the Ministry Officials and reporters camped at the doors of the school. They didn't have to look for the unicorns the unicorns came to them.

The girls and Hagrid stood to the side while the elves and the unicorns conferred. Dobby spoke after a while.

"They will do this for Sirius in honor of his battle with that evil one. They are concerned about the giant spiders. The spiders have captured many of their young. The unicorns will soon leave the Forest if the spiders continue. The elves will see to the spiders. Hagrid you must not interfere, the balance of life has been disturbed. It must be corrected if the unicorns are to survive."

Hagrid looked exceedingly glum but nodded.

The herd leader, an enormous stallion, not quite able to look Hagrid in the eye paced over to them. Dobby conjured a crystal vial and a silver knife. He bowed low before the unicorn and asked a question in a language none of the others knew. The unicorn nodded. Dobby handed Harry the knife.

"He wants you to take the blood Harry."

Harry gulped and stared at the unicorn. She felt weighed to an ounce in a scale that was calibrated to measure good. She felt unworthy, grimed with the blood of battle and with having taken life. The stallion took a pace forward and gently butted Harry in the chest. Reflexively she reached up and rubbed behind his ears. Hermione scritched the other ear as the three spent a quiet minute in mutual regard. The unicorn gave a soft whuffle and lifted his head.

Harry and Hermione bowed low. Hermione held the crystal vial as Harry drew the silver knife in a quick light swipe over the perfect hide. Quickly the vial filled with steaming ruby red blood. Harry reached for her wand and traced the cut murmuring "Episkey". Where before there had been no blemish there was now a small lightning bolt scar. Sorrow in her eyes, Harry began to apologize to

the stallion. The unicorn tossed his head proudly, whickered to his herd, and led them off into the Forest.

"The Headmaster will be very interested in tha."

Hagrid looked deep in thought as he went to look for the Headmaster, leaving the others in the Great Hall.

Dobby, Limpy and the girls trotted off to the infirmary with the vial of unicorn blood. Auntie Poppy took it in her hand and held it to the light. The red glow from the vial lit her hand even through her flesh. Poppy called for Snape and Flamel. The three of them poured over books and scrolls, new and old over the next hours. The streaks on Sirius's arms were almost to his chest, and were moving more rapidly. His fever continued to climb as he took on a deathly pallor, scabs forming on his exposed skin. His breath slowed and became shallow. The girls sat with him in increasing fear. After what seemed an eternity the Headmaster walked into the room accompanied by an elf.

"This is Nodsy, she is skilled in elven healing. Please include her in your discussion. We must reach a decision quickly, Sirius hasn't much time."

The Poppy, Snape and Flamel all regarded Nodsy with a bit of skepticism as she examined Sirius.

She turned to the other healers.

"We must begin his cure, he is nearly gone. His wounds are cursed by the Dementor Lord. If we can not cure him, he will become as they were. That is the curse of that blade. Those cut by it become Dementors as you call them."

It was Remus who spoke first.

"What can we do?" His voice broke at the end of his words. He hadn't slept since the battle, standing watch over his friend hour after hour.

"You will hold him. The curse will struggle to compete itself. You must be his strength. If there are others who love him, gather them here."

The Headmaster put his wand to the wall of the castle and spoke softly. His words reached every corner. He asked all who loved the old dog to come to the infirmary to aid in his healing. Soon the place was packed.

Nodsy instructed everyone to hold their love for Sirius foremost in their minds and to be in physical contact with one another. Then she turned to Harry.

"You will pour the blood onto each wound. There will be some left. Drink three drops, then give the rest to Sirius."

Harry nodded, her eyes huge in her face. She felt Hermione's gentle hand rub her back once, twice and then it was time. She unstoppered the vial and poured enough blood on the wounds to cover them, drank what she hoped was three drops and poured the rest into her godfather.

At first there was nothing. It seemed time hung still. Then Sirius swallowed and began to spasm and thrash. A darkness seeped out of him. Remus struggled to maintain contact with the wildly thrashing man. Sirius spoke in a voice he had never used before.

"He is mine, he has been mine for many years. I will end him and be made new." The darkness poured from Sirius, beginning to shape itself. The temperature dropped and hope fled the people in the infirmary. Through their despair they fought to remember Sirius, prankster, lover, fighter in pink.

Harry's saber snapped into existence and she cut at the shade, full open swings. The forming Dementors sense of regal implacable malice was fraught with concern now, Harry kept swinging, grunting with the effort of the slashes, her sore muscles aching. The last of the dark escaped Sirius as Harry's saber finally caught substance and cut. What would have been the first of the new Dementors fell dead at their feet.

Sirius was pale, soaked in sweat and still. Dan Granger cleared the airway and began heart massage while Emma breathed for Sirius. Everyone else seemed frozen by the effects of the Dementor. Remus and by extension those still connected to him laid his hands over Dan's, over the heart of the Marauder. The wolf willed love into

his best friend. He felt the two small hands join his, the girls weighing in. Finally the hand of Nodsy came to rest on top. By unspoken agreement they pushed with Dan one final time.

Sirius took a breath on his own, his heart pulsed, skipped, pulsed, and began to beat slow and strong. Quickly color made its way over his body, the dead pallor gone.

Wordless Harry and Hermione swept Poppy, Dan, Emma and Nodsy into a tangle of thanksgiving. Clear on the old dogs forearms were two lightning bolt shaped scars.

Poppy began dispensing Dreamless Sleep again, taking no other answer than "Yes ma'am". Nodsy was amused but did allow herself to be fussed over after seeing Poppy take some of her own medicine. Soon the infirmary was full of the sound of deep sleepers. The next mornings Daily Prophet brought welcome news.

"FUDGE FLEES TO FIJI!"

"Very early this morning former Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge was reported to be in the process of clearing customs en route to the glorious tropical island of Fiji. The former Minister left his resignation letter on his desk and had very little to say for himself before taking a portkey. He left with a great deal of baggage including several very heavy crates similar to those used by Gringotts to transport gold. Mrs. Fudge was not present. Fudge was accompanied by his long time undersecretary Dolores Umbridge. Madam Umbridge seemed in the best of spirits although she refused direct comment concerning their travel arrangements and the whereabouts of Mrs. Fudge."

"BONES BAGS BIG JOB"

"Madam Amelia Bones was nominated and confirmed as acting Minister for Magic pending elections in two months time. She spoke very briefly to reporters as she made her way to 10 Downing Street to meet with the muggle Prime Minister Major.

"I look forward to a productive relationship between the Ministry and the Wizengamot. Please excuse me as I have a full day getting to speed on important issues.

Amelia was making her introductory rounds. It was customary for the Minister for Magic to call on the muggle Prime Minister currently Mr. Major.

Mr. Major rose to his feet and came around his desk to greet her. They shook hands each taking the measure of the other.

"A pleasure to met you Madam Bones."

"The pleasure is mine sir."

Tea was served as the two made themselves comfortable before the fire.

"Mr. Major I find myself in a difficult position. I wonder if you might have a moment to listen to my conundrum."

"But of course Madam, how can I help?"

"I have a crisis sir. Our government has grown most disturbingly corrupt over the past twenty years or so. Many in our governing body are guilty of either giving or taking bribes if not outright treason. One of our few leaders has gone outside the law and removed an longstanding threat to our society as well as some persons who pose a more eminent threat. He did this with complete disregard to our laws. Now I must hold him accountable for his actions. His case will be heard by the self same body rife with corruption and bribery as will the cases of the persons who pose so great a threat to our peace."

Mr. Major had not expected this at all. He had hoped to see her do a little magic.

"To whom is your governing body responsible Madam?"

Minister Bones blinked for a few minutes.

"Why I think that the Crown still holds the oaths of the Wizengamot sir."

"There is your answer Madam. Appeal to Her Majesty to call her servants to account. Your predecessor was clear that violation of magical oaths has severe consequences?"

Amelia snorted. "Severe indeed, it is a matter of life or death."

Mr. Major stood and walked to his telephone, punched some buttons and spoke softly for a moment.

"We are expected within the hour. Come Minister, the Crown awaits her servants."

Madam Bones had fought and killed. She had played hard ball politics against evil men for little gain and that not sure. No one would ever think of her as a lightweight. She found herself nervous as a little girl. A quick auto ride, a discreet entrance, a hurried walk through magnificence and she was in the presence of the Queen.

Fortunately she was able to follow Mr. Majors example in greeting her monarch. They got down to business. The Queen seemed eager to exercise direct control of her power rather than her influence. By the end of the meeting Madam Bones was glowing with pleasure. Her Aurors would be present as well as the Queens own security team. The Queen would attend the next days meeting of the Wizengamot.

Courtroom Ten was the usual meeting place for the full Wizengamot. The next morning it was sparsely peopled, mostly by underlings preparing for the days business.

The massive double doors crashed back against the walls of chamber. Minister Bones in formal robes at the head of her Aurors stalked into the room. The Aurors formed up around the outside of the room, covering every inch of it.

Madam Bones took the dais in the center of the room and called out a summoning spell. Every member of the body was put on notice that they were required to be present forthwith. Some minutes went by, the few clerks and such that had been there hurried away to chivvy their bosses along clucking and fussing at them.

Members of the Ministry, department heads and such were required to attend. They trickled, then flooded in. Madam Bones stood still

and answered no one. She was relieved to see Arthur Weasley enter. She had plans for him. Hereditary members, the Lords and Ladies, began to appear. Most were not at all happy. Among them was Dumbledore. Amelia kept her face still when he caught her eye on entering the room except for the quick flicker of a wink. It was not often she got to tug on that over long beard.

A full hour after her summoning there were still people trickling in by ones and twos. Madam Bones came to attention and faced the doorway. Her own protection detail was mixed in with the muggle security that surrounded Her Majesty. Bones would take to her grave the fond memory of Dumbledore's face as his Queen walked into Courtroom Ten as if she owned it. In fact she did own it.

She marched to the dais and stood beside the Minister.

"We are here to renew your oaths to our Crown. Your Minister has asked us to preside over this meeting. We shall do so. Where is Dumbledore?" Her eyes raked the room, calm and steady. The clash of fashion was extreme between Her Majesty and Dumbledore. He rose and bowed deeply.

"Madam Bones tells me you hold several of my citizens. You will cause them to be brought here. You will do this now."

The Headmaster without wiggle room was a sight for sore eyes. Many of the crowd enjoyed his discomfort very much.

"Yes Your Majesty." Dumbledore bowed and drew his wand slowly and carefully. He murmured a spell and his phoenix patronus burst forth. The Queen found she quite liked magic. Dumbledore murmured instructions to his patronus and it streaked away. He bowed again.

The first they heard was shuffling steps and an odd clunking. Mad Eye Moody hobbled into the courtroom at the head of a long line of missing wizards. Never one for subtlety Moody's voice boomed.

"I brought them all Dumbledore. Seems like we might have need of them." Dumbledore's smile was a bit tremulous.

Her Majesty gestured everyone to sit. Her security had sharp eyes on the prisoners and their jailers. The Aurors were alert, on edge.

"Is this everyone Madam Bones?"

"No your Majesty, we are missing at least one. Sirius Black should be here and isn't."

Dumbledore shuffled his feet and coughed. He wondered if he should raise his hand. Knowing how much the Weasley twins would enjoy it he did so. The Ministers eyes were very merry indeed as she watched the queen nod to him.

"Your pardon Majesty, Lord Black is currently in the infirmary at Hogwarts recovering from a serious illness. He could be brought here but he would be bedridden. Is it your wish to have him present?"

"Would it kill him?"

Dumbledore blinked rapidly.

"No your Majesty."

"Bring him."

They waited a few more minutes until Poppy Pomfrey backed into the room, fire in her eye, and Sirius floating along behind her still asleep in his hospital bed. It was a very disapproving Poppy that stared at her Queen and sniffed.

"I am here to renew your oaths. You owe your office to me, and to me you owe your allegiance. You will swear a binding magical oath to uphold the Crown or you will be dismissed from this body. All who refuse to swear to me will be held for questioning. Minister call the roll."

There were several who refused to swear. They were bound and herded to the center of the courtroom. Of the people Moody had led in none would swear to the Queen. Last to swear to her was Arthur Weasley. He had never felt prouder in his life of his service to the Ministry.

Her Majesty turned to Dumbledore and Moody.

"And you two rouges? What have you to say for yourselves?"

As one they drew their wands, and swore to their queen.

The Queen glanced at Sirius.

"Can he be woken?"

Poppy sniffed again and waved her wand over him muttering. Sirius began to stir, his eyes fluttering.

Poppy Pomfrey made her curtsy and dared to speak.

"Your Majesty he will be slightly uninhibited due to the nature of his potions. He may not observe the proper forms."

"Is he capable of telling the truth?"

"As much as he ever is Majesty."

The Queen made an amused humming noise of no particular meaning.

The Queen stepped to his bedside.

"Lord Sirius Black I am your Queen. I require your oath of loyalty to the Crown."

Sirius blinked blearily at her.

"Well I'm damned, so you are. Huh. Poppy just what was in that potion?" He stared around him.

"Wizengamot? Hate it! Full of liars and thieves! Are you taking it over Majesty?"

She nodded.

"Your oath Lord Black."

"I, Lord Sirius Black, do swear on my magic and life to uphold the Crown of Magical Britannia. So mote it be!"

He leaned in towards her with a conspiratorial air.

"Good job your here, place needs a damn good cleaning, they've been getting away with murder."

He nodded solemnly and fell back into his pillows. Everyone present was uncomfortably aware that he had spoken the literal truth. Her Majesty turned to the Death Eaters that Moody had led in. Her eyes were ice and fire.

"You are all required to give your binding magical oath of allegiance to the Crown immediately."

None of the moved. She spoke again.

"Lord Voldemort is no Lord. He is the bastard child of Merope Gaunt and Thomas Riddle. His name is Thomas Marvelo Riddle. You do us a disservice calling him Lord. He is an enemy of the crown and of all peaceful people of our land. Any who aid and abet him are enemies of the crown and guilty of treason. Should you fail to deal effectively with this terrorist We will marshal all our resources to have him dealt with. We will allow your Statute of Secrecy to stand so long as the law is upheld in our Domain."

"Minister Bones. We require you to fill the places in your legislative body for us with persons who seem to you worth that honor. Before being placed they undergo my review and will swear fealty to the Crown by binding magical oath. Am I correct that should they break oath their lives are forfeit?"

"You are correct Majesty."

"We further require that you adopt current common law as the basis of your jurisprudence. There will be no more slander in your press, nor prisoners held without trial. We suspect these of treason. See to their fair and speedy trial."

"Dumbledore, Moody you will attend us. Madam Bones we require a small chamber for an audience with these scallywags."

The Queen and her security swept from the courtroom bundling Dumbledore and Moody along.

"All Aurors. Your wands on the floor now." Bones had been head of DMLE for so long to not have instant obedience. The Minister pointed at one. "If you dare, pick up your wand as make your oath."

Kingsley Shacklebolt proudly made his vow. He watched carefully as the other Aurors either swore or were bound and sent to the center of the courtroom. There would be a full house at the Ministry holding cells tonight.

"Tomorrow we will take the oath of every employee at the Ministry. Those who refuse will be remanded for trial on charges of treason. We are done playing patty cake ladies and gentlemen. We will be a society of fair and equal law under our Queen beginning this morning and moving forward. There is room for disagreement. There is no room for violence based on blood or race or any other imaginable criteria. We have bound our magic to this fact. Those who refuse to so bind themselves become outlaws and traitors by decree of their ruler. I will accept nominations for the vacancies made today. Those I approve I will submit to her Majesty for her review."

That Majesty was meeting with the Headmaster and Alastor Moody.

The Queen was seriously angry that matters had progressed to the point that the only available option was to force deadly oaths on the ruling body. She intended to put in some covert oversight immediately. The organization was in place and functioning at least moderately well. Nothing like MI5, but then what was? They had done well for a bunch of housewives and bureaucrats led by a teacher and a one eyed man with a peg leg. She found she quite liked Alastor. By the end of their conversation Dumbledore had come to agree that it was time for him to pass Hogwarts to his long time deputy, Minerva. He and Alastor would need to focus all their energy to fighting Tom Riddle and cleaning her Wizengamot. She remanded them to the tender mercies of her watchers.

I want to thank you all for reading. Your reviews are especially welcome.

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It had been quite a summer. The annihilation of the Dementors would have been world changing by itself. The unbinding of the house elves promised to have cause huge changes in magical society as the elves took their proper place in the magical world. The Queens abrupt assumption of her true power over magical Britannia was an event of enormous importance.

So much had happened in a month.

September 1st was just a bare few days away. For the first time in over fifty years Hogwarts had a new Head. Minerva McGonagal was Headmistress. Gryffindor would have a new head of house. Transfiguration would have a new Professor.

Minerva sat in the Head's office working away at the terrible pile of parchment that she absolutely must do something about. She was pleased that Filius had agreed to being Deputy Headmaster and was showing that he was quite capable of performing those duties.

He had met with the muggleborn first years and their families, giving them an orientation. His kindness and cheer did much to ease the fears of the parents and children. He had given each new muggleborn family a set of communication mirrors. He hoped it would help the non magical parents feel connected to their children despite the isolation of Hogwarts. He had provided every family of a student at the school with a reusable portkey to Hogsmeade. Parents could visit any weekend they cared to and spend time with their children. Minerva thought these changes would be most welcome to both the students and the families.

She prepared for her interview with her the person she hoped would be her new Transfiguration Professor. There was a firm knock on her office door. "Come in please Augusta."

Augusta Longbottom made her way to Minerva and shook her hand firmly.

"It is good to see you Minerva."

"And you as well Augusta. Please have a seat."

The two women sat in comfortable wingback chairs, a small tea table between them, the fire bright in the late afternoon light.

"Augusta, I hope that you are here to take up the position we discussed?"

Minerva studied the woman, trying to guess the answer. She had 50 galleons on the outcome with Poppy.

"I am Minerva, provided that I am not head of Gryffindor House. I do not feel able to discharge that duty."

Minerva sighed. She owed Poppy.

"Very well Augusta, I will ask another professor to be head the Lions. You will find that your lesson plans are in order. I will be most happy to help you in any way I can, you have only to ask. Would you like me to attend the first few classes as you get your feet wet so to speak?"

"No, thank you Minerva, I am quite ready."

Seeing the steel in the old woman's eye Minerva had no doubt. She nodded.

"Very well, let us go to your quarters and classroom, we must set the wards for your use."

They walked through the halls, footsteps echoing in the nearly empty building, discussing the events of the summer. They reset the wards to Madam Longbottom's magical signature and Minerva left her colleague to arrange her things.

It had been merely days ago that the elves had marched out of Hogwarts and into the Forest, singing.

One of Minerva's major struggles as Headmistress was to find adequate staffing for the school on such short notice. The magical world was experiencing a severe labor shortage. Wages were skyrocketing.

Minerva felt blessed that she had been able to hire Molly Weasley to oversee the kitchens. She expected a lot less trouble and a lot more study out of the twins and Ronald with their mother in the building.

Many of the tasks formerly done by the elves of Hogwarts would be done by workers from the lycan village. One of Minerva's first acts as Headmistress was to retire Filch. He would easily be able to find work with a wealthy pureblood family as a domestic. He would fit right in with some of the darker families. As a parting gift she had given him all the well oiled instruments he enjoyed threatening the students with. She had kept his collection of confiscated items. When she had a spare minute she had ever intention of riffling it for treasure.

On September 1st Harry woke early, got clean and dressed quickly and hustled downstairs, ready for the start of a new year at Hogwarts. The year promised to be interesting as the magical world recovered from some of the sever shocks it had taken over the summer.

She had grown some more, she was now five foot eight inches in her bare feet. Her constant training and tough physical conditioning kept her in amazing physical condition. She was broad shouldered, with a narrow waist, and her hips had become much more evident over the summer. Her legs were long and muscled. Even at rest she had noticeable biceps. Her hands were calloused from her saber practice and her work around the Farm and in the lycan village. She was no longer a girl, she was a young woman and looked it. Her hair was lustrous, soft, a mass of curls and spikes that no hairdresser would have dared to create. She kept it just longer than her neck, short ponytail length. Her face even without makeup was stunning, narrow like a hawk, with large piercing green almond shaped eyes. People felt caught when she stared at them. She moved easily, balanced like a dancer or a fighter.

Today she had put on makeup, accentuated her lashes, a bit of eyeshadow, some lip gloss and a bit of perfume, a light floral scent she liked. She was dressed all in black, her preferred color. A soft silk turtleneck, black tights, and soft leather boots with a stack heel. Her Auntie Poppy had already left for Hogwarts to finish the final preparation on her infirmary. Harry grabbed her trunk and the portkey, glanced around for anything she was forgetting and activated the key.

She managed to stay upright mostly because Hermione grabbed her as she staggered on landing. Harry dropped her trunk and got the patented Hermione hug. They had only been a few days apart but she had missed her blood sister.

"Well don't you look like a slice of hotness. Is this for me or do you have your green eyes on someone?"

Harry blushed at her friend.

"Just because I took a minute or two getting ready doesn't mean it's the end times."

Hermione snorted.

"For you it does. So what are you up to Miss?"

"It just feels like the start of something new. I wanted to look good today. Is it alright, how I look?"

"Well other than being a bit black you look stunning, very dishy."

Harry nodded her thanks. She didn't often venture very far into girly girlness. On Harry's map it said "Here there be monsters"

"You look very pretty your own self Mione."

Hermione had gotten Harry to tame her hair into a luxurious mass of soft mahogany curls. She had trimmed her hair so it didn't overpower her face. Harry kind of missed the wild mass of it, but Hermione did look great in the new style. She had used a bit more makeup than Harry. She was in a bright cotton blouse in a warm yellow with a pair of hiphugger faded bluejeans and spiffy trainers.

The girls each got an end of Harry's trunk and toted it to the waiting auto. With a bit of muttered cursing they wedged the two trunks in the boot and closed the lid.

Dan and Emma finished locking up and met the girls at the car. The Grangers were all huggers. Harry had her ribs tested twice more and they were off for Kings Cross chattering about the news of the rapidly evolving magical world. Emma handed Harry a pocket mirror.

"It's got ours on it dear, we want to hear from you over the year. Your Aunties will be right there I know but we still want to hear from our other daughter."

Harry nodded vigorously, her eyes suspiciously moist.

All too soon they were on the Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. The crowd seemed relaxed and festive. There were people absent, those who had been swept up in the changes, families that had lost everything when the Queen entered Courtroom 10. For those at the station the atmosphere was heady with relief.

Harry and Hermione exchanged hugs all around and tugged their trunks over to the baggage car. They boosted the trunks up to the lycans who were stacking them into place.

"Hi Jimmy! How is your mum?"

"She's grand Hermione, working in the kitchen with Mrs. Weasley. Stop in and tell her hello!"

The girls waved and grinned then headed off to find a compartment. They were early, the train wouldn't leave for 30 minutes yet. Lee Jordan was running the pool on the Weasley arrival time. Harry put 5 galleons on five minutes till 11. Hermione snorted and put 5 on them not making it at all without Mrs. Weasley there to chivvy them around.

Neville and Luna joined the girls. Trevor was keeping an eye out for Ron. The two had never come to an understanding about chocolate frogs. The foursome chatted along happy as clams with the minutes ticked away. Harry had a stack of 5 galleons in her hand ready for Lee when he strutted in whistling. She paid him and glowered at his smirk. He wandered in the direction of his next collection.

At precisely 11 am the train blew its steam whistle and started to move. At precisely 11 am the Weasleys burst through the barrier as full gallop, trunks bouncing behind them, running full out for the train. The men in the baggage car cast summoning charms on the trunks while the Weasley friends up and down the train cast summoning charms on the Weasleys. Ron and Ginny flew into the girls compartment causing a massive pileup. Penelope neatly landed Percy. The twins seemed have been summoned by several different

people and were subject to a tug of war. Their eyes got huge as the end of the platform raced at them. Everyone let them go at once. They smashed down, skidding across the splintery wood of the platform howling. The luggage men summoned them just as the car whipped past the platform.

All up and down the train people were laughing so hard they couldn't stand. From the baggage car language their mother would never hear from them echoed at extreme volume while the lycans howled with laughter.

Ginny and Ron were righted and sat. Ginny started ranting about idiot brothers and packing. Ron tried to defend himself, but it was no use, his sister had the overwhelming weight of evidence on her side. Soon the twins stopped by hoping that Poppy's niece could help them with a few splinters.

Harry concentrated on working the splinters free. The twins had good reactions so most of them were in the hands and forearms. Everyone else in the compartment was trying to get her laughing so her hand would shake making the splinter dig around. Mostly they were unsuccessful.

Lee had to return the entire betting pool. No one had thought they would arrive on the dot and still make the train.

First Aid finished the twins plopped onto the bench seats.

"So ickle girls no more eh Fred?"

"To right George. The Warriors are branching out a bit aren't they? Looking decidedly dateable"

"And it seems only yesterday they were ickle firsties with buggers sliding down their innocent little mushes."

"That it does brother mine. Note the shape on them. When did that happen?"

Fred turned to George. They nodded in unison.

"Magic"

"Must be. A glamor. There is no earthly way these creatures are any relation to the wee ones of May."

The twins drew their wands and cast "Finite Incantium".

The girls stared at them as if they had grown extra heads. As one they drew their wands. The twins paled. The girls cast together.

"Finite Incantium."

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

Harry shook her head.

"Didn't take sister."

Hermione looked thoughtful. She poked them both.

"No it didn't. Shame really. Must be ingrained. Genetic male gitism wouldn't you say Harry?"

Harry nodded sadly.

"Got to be it. I had hopes for them too. Next you know they will be talking to our chests."

Harry never should have said that.

The twins scooped the squealing girls into their laps and began intense conversations with their breasts.

"Well Leftie, looking very pert I must say, and nicely round as well! Are you busy later?"

Harry got her twin by the hair and jerked his head back. Her emerald eyes were alight with laughter and more than a bit of anger and embarrassment.

"Stop now or I will hurt you." She was staring right into his devil glint blue eyes. Heat, her blood was suddenly hot, and heavy, pumping like molten iron, pooling in her belly. She was terrified. "Stop" It was a whisper. George nodded mutely, fire licking in the back of his eyes.

"Right you are Harry, most disrespectful. I am sorry. We get carried away sometimes." He lifted her easily and set her beside him.

Harry felt dizzy, she was afraid if she tried to stand she would fall over. She felt guilty. She stole a glance at Hermione. Her sister looked back at her, dazed, flushed, eyes dilated and confused.

Harry reached across to her and took her hand.

"Ok Hermione?"

Hermione nodded vaguely. "Ummhmm."

Slowly the conversation picked up. Harry got up and dug through her rucksack, sure she had brought along that one outline of Occulumenty. It was there. She let her rucksack fall back onto the luggage rack. George tore his eyes away from her as she turned. She had been stretched out reaching over him. Her turtleneck had ridden up a bit showing the faintest trace of a trail of black hair started just below her navel and disappeared under her tights. She thrust the book at him.

"Learn this. Fast."

He looked at her standing over him. She was perhaps the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. Fierce and free and strong beyond steel. He nodded, gently took the book from her, and began to read. Fred sputtered, snatched the book and copied it. George had his back in a second. Neither twin looked at the other. Neither said a word for the rest of the ride.

Ginny had watched the interplay with amazement. She was sure that it would be Harry and Hermione together. She had quite looked forward to the kerfuffle that would have caused. It certainly would have been an ice breaker for what she half hoped worked out with Luna. Hermione's reaction was unclear to her. Was she in shock over Fred or over Harry's reaction to George? Ginny was sure the sexual tension coming off of Harry was tangible, hell it was almost visible. Ginny sighed. At least it wasn't Ron. Ron was a good bloke, but just not up to speed with the Warriors. Still she didn't expect it to end well. The twins always tried the switch, if the girl couldn't tell them apart they were done with her. No girl ever had been able know for sure which was which. It was shaping up to be a very

interesting school year indeed. Ginny's daydreams turned to the Headmistress's ward dating one of the most notorious pranksters since the Marauders. Of course there was the test period. Harry would have to survive a prank war. It looked to be an interesting year socially.

Neville sat in the compartment with four of the best looking girls in Hogwarts. He did it easily. They were his friends. He saw the interaction between Harry and one of the twins. God bless the child who could tame the Falcon. Neville had always called her that in his mind. It was those fierce piercing eyes. Hermione seemed dazed. She blinked slowly and shook her head once in a while as if to shake water out of her ears.

Luna sat quietly. She was waiting. Ginevra was almost ready. She smiled and went back to her reading. The Quibbler really was much more interesting upside down.

As dark fell the boys left the compartment so the girls could get into their robes, and vice versa. The boys were still changing as evidenced by the thumping and shouting behind the door as the train eased to a stop in Hogsmeade station.

Compartments burst open and a flood of children headed for the carriages. Harry and Hermione made a beeline to Hagrid for their rib test. They had seen him only days ago, but it was hard to not miss Hagrid. He hugged them all the while bellowing for the first years to come to him. Percy Weasley was strutting around the platform like a bantam rooster, head boy badge gleaming in the gaslights. Penelope, the Head Girl, was guiding the first years to Hagrid. The girls joined the lines of students waiting for a carriage, holding hands just as natural as ever. Harry jumped when she realized it and felt a deep deep ache ease. Hermione squeezed her hand softly.

"Alright Harry?"

"Am now Mione."

They smiled, neither looking at the other. A twin materialized at either elbow and a carriage was before them. Fred handed Hermione in and George handed in Harry, they followed and sat comfortably close yelling for the rest of the lot. Ginny and Neville

made it in before the carriage left the station in a quick trot to the castle.

The students rumbled into the Great Hall with a deal of noise and confusion, laughter and clatter.

The staff was waiting for them. Quite quickly everyone was in and settled. Professor Flitwick brought in the first years to be sorted. The Hat sang it's usual doggerel. It would never be Rogers and Hammerstein. This year the song was quite upbeat and cheery, it was a song about growth and healing without a single dire warning. The applause was over quickly. The faster the sorting was done the faster the feast appeared.

It was a memorable feast. Molly Weasley in the kitchen aided by a number of lycans had produced food equal to the best the castle ever seen. Ron was in heaven while the girls began his table manners revision again. They sat side by side holding hands, across from them were the twins. Conversation was spirited enough that twin speak even dropped out now and then. Fred and Hermione were deep in a discussion of the theory of explosive potions while George and Harry were gnashing over the necessity for physical fitness in magical combat.

"May I have your attention please students. I would like to welcome you back to Hogwarts for another year. I hope we will all leave here healthy, happy, and with a greater fund of knowledge than we have today. It is my first year as Headmistress. I have had to resign as head of house for Gryffindor. Professor Septima Vector will be the new head of Gryffindor, I am sure she will be brilliant. I expect my Lions to support her with the same spirit you supported me. Our new professor of Transfiguration is Professor Augusta Longbottom. I have every confidence in her. Our Professor Rebeus Hagrid will instruct us in Care of Magical Creatures. Professor Flitwick is Head of Ravenclaw and Assistant Headmaster. Professor Dumbledore has been called into direct service to the Crown. Mr. Filch has left to pursue other interests. He took with him his favorite devices. I know how this saddens you all. I would like to thank all the staff both past and present for being of service to our school.

As you know there are no more house elves. That race had been unbound from their thousand of years of servitude to follow their own destiny separate from that of humans. To the best of our knowledge

the elves are creating their own living accommodations in the Forbidden Forest. We hope that we will see them rejoin us in some capacity very soon. I miss them a very great deal as do you all I am sure. The curse that bound them was the curse that gave us Dementors. I find myself more than happy to work a bit more in a Dementor free world. You will find that Hogwarts will require more of our effort to run smoothly. Detentions will become much more plentiful in comparison to house points lost. If you run afoul of the school rules expect to put in a significant amount of labor."

Auntie Minerva seemed to be staring at the twins.

"Prefects please guide the first years to their rooms. It is time for bed as classes will begin bright and early tomorrow."

There was scattered applause as the children rumbled out of the Hall and into their Houses.

Harry and Hermione walked down the halls hand in hand as always. Their outer arms were tucked into the arms of George and Fred respectively. Four abreast they swept all before them and left eddies of the tastiest gossip in ages behind them. Harry felt six foot tall and made of carbon-moly steel. She felt goofy and chilled and very very happy. She started to laugh, for no reason just because life was so damn sweet at that moment. George assisted her through the portrait hole, Hermione right after.

There was a massive jumble of trunks in the middle of the common room. Percy clapped his hands several times to get attention.

"Alright chaps, sort them out by girls or boys and lets get them put up."

It was the work of a few minutes for all the trunks to be stowed in all the dorm rooms. Harry ended her agony of indecision by taking Hermione's hand and returning to the common room. She was very pleased to see the Twins faces relax when they saw the girls coming back down the stairs.

Hermione didn't miss a step as she walked up to the twin in George's clothes.

"Why did you change with George?"

Fred looked directly into her eyes.

"You can tell it's me?"

Hermione nodded.

"I couldn't have before today, but I can now. Paid sufficient attention finally I think."

Fred dropped his eyes.

"Was it my discussion with your chest?"

She boxed his ears.

"No you idiot, it was your eyes."

He looked at her again. Gently he reached out and took her hand, she let him lead her to a window seat with a view of the grounds under the quarter moon.

Harry tried to hide her grin. She reached out and shyly took George's hand. His hands were calloused.

"How did your hands get so calloused George?"

"Oh I had a summer job in the village. Landscaping for a muggle company. Couldn't use magic, but it put a bit of money into the family vault, helps to pay for this lot."

"Are we going to be alright George?"

He tilted his head to one side and considered her solemnly.

"Things happened fast eh Harry? One second playing and the next there was you. I don't know. I want us to be alright. I expect it will take some doing. Fred and I are barely housebroken, reckon your up for it?"

"If you need to know, do the switch a few more times. I can understand it. But only a few. Once you know stop."

He nodded.

"So what are we Harry?"

She turned and looked at him. She stood 5 foot 11 in her boots and she still looked up at him.

"Don't know yet George. Lets find out."

She leaned forward and brushed her lips over his, barely touching. He pulled her into him gently. She had her arms on his chest and he held her loosely, not binding her. Her eyes fluttered closed and she brushed his lips again. He stayed still, not pursuing her, letting her choose. She tilted her head down. He kissed her forehead.

He barely heard her murmur.

"I want to prank someone. All the evil gits are gone, do you suppose we could pass around a parchment for people to sign on for a prank war?"

"Well Harry my dear, there is Fred and Hermione. Seems like justice does it not? The start of something beautiful?"

In the history of mankind fewer evil giggles have ever been recorded than the ones that night in the Gryffindor common room.

Thank you for reading. I hope you enjoy the story

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Chapter 14 Mixed Messages

Harry was having trouble getting to sleep. She ran through her Occulumenty exercises in order to still her thoughts. Her mind was a whirlwind. She was wound up way to high to sleep at the moment. Sighing, she slipped from her bed and wrapped herself in a robe. Whisper quiet she made her way to the common room, to one of the chairs before the fire. It was a minutes work to throw a few logs on and poke up the embers. Normally she would have called Dobby for some hot chocolate and some company. Dobby was very likely doing much more important work than sitting with a confused young woman in the middle of the night.

She gradually lost herself in the flames, letting her mind drift over the day. How the hell had she ended up infatuated with George Weasley? Sure he was a cute boy, but he was loud, and rambunctious, always in motion. He didn't know that Harriet Pomfrey had been born Harry Potter either. He might have some opinions about that. He would for sure have some opinions about that. He had to learn Occulumenty fast. Only Occulumenty wasn't something you learned fast, it was an intense mental discipline. No one ever mentioned the twins and discipline in the same sentence expect to insist the former learn more of the latter.

But he lit her up inside. Her mind drifted over the memory of his eyes as he when he looked at her in the compartment of the Express. Her thoughts churned on until sleep ambushed her.

She jerked awake with the first light and first noise of the day. Aching from a night curled into an armchair she hustled up the stairs to the shower and then to the dorm to get dressed for the first day of classes. She had new subjects this year, Care of Magical Creatures, Arithmancy, and Ancient Runes along with the core subjects of Defense, Charms, Transfiguration, Astronomy, Herbology, History and Potions. Being near Hermione took a lot of work. Her bookbag over her shoulder she quietly left for the Great Hall and breakfast. Things were so unsettled for her that she didn't wait for Hermione as usual, and hoped to avoid the twins. The common room was empty to her relief. A quick trip to the Great Hall and some coffee would

see her right. Slowly the Hall filled. Hermione bustled in and took her usual seat next to Harry.

"Whats going on Harry? You weren't in bed last night."

Harry squirmed in her seat, knowing that there was no stopping Hermione when she was on the track of something.

"Couldn't sleep Mione. I feel funny about everything, I'm so confused." Her husky voice was low and hoarse.

Hermione nodded. "Are we going to tell them?"

Harry sighed. "Have to. But I can't until they know Occulumency and that will take half of forever."

"We need to talk too Harry. It's not just about them, it's about us too." Harry nodded. Unease bubbled in her stomach. She felt like most of her certainties were gone, her anchors. Their friends trickled in, seating themselves and gradually waking up with the rise in caffeine level. Everyone was a quarter beat off of the usual easy hum of conversation and companionship. The twins sauntered in and plopped themselves across from the girls. Those spots had remained open by unspoken agreement. Eyes met questioning eyes.

"Looks like our two birds are for the worm brother. Up so early and all."

"That it does, that it does. How are the worms today ladies? Especially tasty on the first day of class?"

Harry sighed theatrically

"You obviously need caffeine. Your banter shows sign of intelligence deprivation."

Hermione wordlessly began pouring cups of tea for them, cup after cup, until they were surrounded by a steaming ocean of tea.

"Finish that lot and start over gentlemen."

Eyebrows quirked and smiles smirked. Conversation became more relaxed and general with Ron crowing over his easy schedule while

Harry and Hermione only missed taking every possible course by two courses. Professor Vector passed out schedules and with a few more hurried bites they decamped for the first class of the year. Harry and Hermione walked as usual hand in hand. Each sported a twin as accoutrement. Harry loved sweeping through the corridors four abreast.

Harry found herself fascinated when she was introduced to Ancient Runes. Runes were capable of enormous power and subtlety. They were commonly used in warding schemes and often in rituals. Hogwarts had the strongest wards known, due to the amount of time they had been in place as well as the massive amount of magic available for her to draw from. A bit of all the magical energy expended by her people was absorbed by the castles wards. It was the raw power of those wards that made the castle one of the safest places in magical Britannia.

Professor Babbling took them through a common rune set, one of Norse origin, explaining in general terms what each rune stood for. The Professor suggested Arithmancy as an adjunct study, the subjects complimented one another.

This was new territory for Harry whose relationship with her magic was instinctual, nearly organic. Hermione was much more comfortable with the structured logical layering of runes to create wards or as a component part of rituals. It was something like computer programming, tiny instructions being part of an integrated whole.

Lunch was pleasant with teasing galore between the friends. The Great Hall was a much more cheerful place expect for the Slytherin table. There were more than a few worried faces. Some parents were guests of the Crown and the new Minister was not taking offers for custom fit justice. Some parents were not yet guests of the Crown but thought they might be so accommodated should the wrong question be answered truthfully. It was not just the snakes, there were scrunched faces spotted all over the Hall. Minerva would be passing that information to Albus and Alastor in the evening.

Minerva watched her niece, her daughter. Harry had made a radical change in direction yesterday. She looked tired and worried and happy all at once. Minerva was very, very glad to be past her teens. The Weasley twins and the girls seemed to be enjoying one another,

but there was a tension. It didn't take Albus to imagine what that tension might be. Minerva resolved to corner her daughter with the aid of Poppy and have a Talk. The Headmistress had never missed Limpy more. Talks with Harry tended to be volatile. Limpy was expert at damage mitigation.

The girls hustled through the rest of their day and a hurried meal before heading for the library in an effort to get ahead of the crushing surge of coursework their class load would require.

The twins idled in after a few hours and asked the girls to go for a stroll. Harry gulped and nodded as did Hermione.

"We can only be gone a little bit, there is a lot to do with all the courses we have."

The girls smoothly switched partners.

"Stop that you two. We know which is which."

The pairs headed down different corridors, each pair holding hands.

"So young Harrykins I sense a bit of tension between us. What can I do to be rid of it?"

"You know that book I gave you George? Learn that. Fast as you can."

"Since it came from a blessed maidens hand I did spend the odd minute with it. Learning it will take months maybe years. Just the little I did read showed me it teaches you to seal your mind against another. I would hazard a guess that you have a secret you need kept."

George pulled his wand and waved it for a moment muttering.

"That little spell causes anyone that is in listening to hear us humming their least favorite tune. Very annoying for them, very private for us."

"I can't tell you what I need to until you can seal your mind George. I just can't."

They had stopped and he swung her to face him. All the levity was gone from his face, hers was full of tension, pain and fear. He put his hands on her shoulders then started to draw her to him. She resisted a touch and he relaxed, not pushing her.

"Erm, I don't know quite what to do here Harry. Help me out."

She reached out to him a hand on either side of his face. She called her magic to her and willed for him the lightning reactions she shared with Hermione, the enhanced senses her magic had given her. He blinked and staggered a little at the flood of information coming in, the overpowering smells, the tiny rustle of mice nesting behind walls fifty feet away, the grain of the stone on the steps at the end of the corridor. She smiled, a ghost of a smile and gone.

"I don't know what to do George. I never felt anything like I did yesterday on the train. I thought I knew what I wanted and who and how."

He nodded.

"I was more than a little caught off guard Harry. Like mum says it's all in fun till someone loses an eye."

Harry snorted.

"Does she really?"

"Has done. She was holding an eye at the time." He shuddered, goosebumps appearing on his arms, those arms strong and tan from the work he did for his family. Harry kept her hands to herself, just.

"She conjured it."

"Actually she didn't. It was Percy's. Bit of a joke gone wrong. There was holy hell to pay for that one."

Harry grinned.

"How do you expect me to be all serious and angsty and all when you say stuff like that?"

"Well there it is, you can't, and I don't. Serious and angsty, the very idea is anathema! Is this what you did, the smell and vision and stuff, is this a spell? Will it wear off?"

"No it won't wear off. It's permanent unless you want me to change it back. I can do that for Fred too if you think he would like it. Should do it for everyone come to think of it."

"Easy now Harry, gives us a distinct advantage for pranking doesn't it?"

"Let's don't back away from the tiger just yet George. I like you a lot, always have. Yesterday I felt a very strong attraction to you, I didn't expect it, hadn't planned for it, not sure what to do about it. It happened so fast, what if it leaves just that quick? There is more too, stuff that is important to us that I can't tell you until you can protect your mind."

"There is another way Harrykins."

George pulled his wand.

"On my life and magic I swear to keep Harriet Pomfrey's secrets. So mote it be!"

"You idiot! Do you know what you've done? If Snape tries to take a peek to see if we have kissed your dead!"

George paled. Harry grabbed his arm and marched him down the corridor towards the Headmistress's office swearing like a sailor.

"Don't look at anyone. Move you dolt!" Being George Weasley he began to laugh. She snarled at him.

"What's so funny?"

"Here I am almost dating the prettiest girl in Hogwarts, a woman of depth, power, and mystery. Suddenly I can't kiss and tell on pain of death, and can't know anything much about her for months. The only way I can survive for those months is to stay away from her which is the very last thing I want to do! How do I get myself into these things?"

Harry's opinions as to how he had managed to hoist himself so exquisitely on his own petard were coarse and colorful to say the least. They arrived at the gargoyle leading to the heads office.

"Whiskers"

The gargoyle jumped aside and they rode the stairs to the top. The Headmistress called for them to enter. Harry, under a full head of steam, lurched into the heads office tugging a giggling George. Harry rounded on him like a panther.

"Keep your eyes down and don't say a word!"

George began a careful inspection of the carpet, his shoulders shaking while he emitted snorting noises.

Auntie Minerva sat down in the heads chair, carefully gathering her courage.

"What is it Harriet? What have you and Mr. Weasley done?"

"IT WAS HIM! THE GREAT LUMPING IDIOT! HE MADE AN UNBREAKABLE VOW TO KEEP MY SECRETS!"

"Lower your voice young lady. Whatever possessed you to do such a thing Mr. Weasley?"

"Well Professor, she told me I had to learn to shield my mind before she could tell me what was going on between us, and that would take months, so I thought an unbreakable vow would be faster and as safe for her."

"Mr. Weasley."

There was a long terrible pause. George chanced a peek at McGonagall. The situation was indeed dire. She had evidently given up her lips completely, and her eyes were slits. George wouldn't have been surprised if she breathed fire. Harry threw herself into a chair, pulled her legs up and wrapped her arms around them. She commenced to beating her head against her knees. Studying the carpet again George resolved to spend a bit of time with a Gaelic dictionary to decipher the mutterings he heard from McGonagall.

"Is there any way to release him from the vow Auntie?"

"There may be, I am not sure. I will have to ask Filius. Mr. Weasley you have put yourself in extreme danger. As usual with you it was well meant."

McGonagall paused to shake her head and mutter some more.

"I had expected dating to be complicated for you Harriet, but this.. In any event, I will consult with Professor Flitwick. You must not speak of Miss Pomfrey to anyone Mr. Weasley. Avoid direct eye contact with everyone. It would be for the best that you see as little of each other as possible. The less you know the fewer chances you have of triggering your ridiculous vow young man. I am strongly tempted to deduct points from Gryffindor for lunacy. I can only hope that Professor Flitwick can assist us in revoking the vow. You are dismissed."

They walked slowly back to the tower. Just before they got to the painting Harry pulled George into a fierce hug.

"I'm so sorry George."

He sighed and kissed her forehead.

"Not to worry Harry, learning a bit of discretion won't go amiss little miss."

He handed her through the entrance and watched her dash away to the girls dorm. She looked near tears, a feeling he could relate to.

Harry showered and changed for bed. She pulled the curtains closed, cast a silencing charm and fought to find a little peace.

She was called to the Headmistress's office in the late afternoon of the following day. She had avoided George all day and was feeling cranky and out of sorts. Her world usually spun smoothly but this was just not one of those times. She arrived to see both her aunts, George and Professor Flitwick. Flitwick was very precise, drawing the memory of the vow from George and showing it in a pensieve so they were all aware of the exact wording.

"Very ah.. gallant of you Mr. Weasley. It is George isn't it?" Harry and George nodded together.

"I believe I can help you out of this situation Mr. Weasley. What is required is a countervailing oath. Miss Pomfrey if you care to release the young man you would have to take an Unbreakable Vow that nothing Mr. Weasley now knows or ever knows is a secret. You would in effect give him permission to speak about whatever he knows or ever will know about you. Can you do that Miss Pomfrey?"

The Headmistress rocked back in her chair. Harry rounded on the hapless Weasley with a growl. She stared at him a long minute. He was fighting a grin, his eyes dancing.

"I Harriet Pomfrey do swear that all George Weasley may know of me now or know of me ever is his to speak of as he will. So mote it be!"

Flitwick nodded. The forms were complete, oddly phrased but the idiot should be safe now.

"It might be best if you are very very discrete regarding Miss Pomfrey Mr. Weasley. It wouldn't do to test this and find that we had failed to consider some aspect of the vow. That will be all children"

Minerva waved them from her office. Once the door was shut she poured a generous three fingers of firewhiskey for each of them.

"Stop giggling you idiot man. What possessed the boy I can't imagine."

Filius sipped his whiskey with pleasure. The devil glinted in his eye. He truly did enjoy winding up his old friend.

"Minerva it is not that difficult to guess what secrets young Harriet might have. I expect that half the school suspects her secret, the resemblance is uncanny."

"They may Filius, and they may be wrong. Remember what we just went through not minutes ago. What you do not know can not be gotten from you. Let this sleeping dog lie."

Serious now he regarded her carefully.

"Whatever the truth may be it will not stay hidden much longer." Minerva glowered at her fire and held her silence.

By the end of the week Harry was going crazy. She had way overestimated her academic abilities, she had too much to learn and not enough time. She made her way to her new head of house Professor Vector.

"Professor thank you for seeing me. I need to discuss my schedule with you if you don't mind. I feel overwhelmed by it. I would like to drop some classes.

Septima Vector was an attractive woman, in her thirties, always neatly turned out and polite, soft spoken. She did not seem a Gryffindor but had moved in to her head of house duties seamlessly.

"May I see your schedule Miss Pomfrey?"

Harry handed over the parchment.

"Mmmh, yes I can see that this is quite a bit of work. What had you imagined dropping if I may inquire?"

"I thought to drop Herbology and Astronomy ma'am. I know those are core courses, however I think I can revise them over the summer sufficiently to attain an OWL in them. I would love to continue with Runes and Arithmancy, it is my hope to someday craft spells and rituals for lightside enhancements."

"What of your friend Miss Granger? How is she holding up under the pressure?"

"Ma'am the world will stop before Hermione will ever drop a course. She will never admit she is doing too much. She is sleeping maybe 5 hours a night, and working like mad. It's not healthy for her, but try to convince her."

"I believe I will Miss Pomfrey. I will support your schedule revision and forward it to the Headmistress for her approval. I shall do the same for the indomitable Miss Granger. There is no need to inform her of your involvement in this matter. I expect to have difficulty getting her to accept some limits."

Harry nodded vigorously.

"Thank you for seeing me Professor." Professor Vector nodded pleasantly and watched her young lion totter to the door, shutting it softly behind her. She left her desk and threw a pinch of floo powder into the fire calling for the Headmistress.

"Yes Septima?"

"Harry has just been here. You owe Poppy 10 galleons. She wants to drop Astronomy and Herbology. She says she can revise them over the summer to OWL level. Do you think she can?"

"I have no doubt. We will do the same for Miss Granger. They will be able to take the Muggle Studies OWL with their current skill set. That leaves Divination."

The women shared an eye roll and a snort. Minerva pressed a bit.

"How did she seem otherwise Septima?"

"She seemed tired, and perhaps a bit depressed. I think all is not well in her world. Are you as glad as I that we are well past that most painful age Minerva?"

"I am indeed. Should you require assistance reigning in Miss Granger please do let me know. I will be glad to put the imprimatur of the Headmistress on her schedule revision."

Harry idled towards the dorm relaxing from the interview with her new head of house. It had gone well. She had a more reasonable schedule and could include her ongoing combat training with Remus, Sirius, Flitwick and whatever other members of the Order were available. All week she had been playing hide and seek with George. Hermione and Fred seemed comfortable when they were together, which was very seldom given the girls schedules and the boys schedules. Combat training and Quidditch practice cut into what would normally be social time. Additionally the twins were in their OWL year and having their mother in the castle keeping a closer eye on them than they were used to was definitely cutting back on a lot of their usual activities.

That is not to say that pranking was neglected. Harry's connection into Slytherin House, Millie, was very willing to spread a bit of chaos for the foursome. Two days ago at breakfast Pansy had stood and announced the commencement of an all comers prank war.

It had been the height of the meal, the Great Hall full and the air humming with conversation and banter. Pansy stood suddenly and began to yell.

"Oyez, Oyez, Oyez! Let it here be known that the great prank war has begun! All contestants shall announce their intention to participate during a meal in the Great Hall. The New Marauders are in!"

Pansy was hopping mad at having someone use her voice without her permission and swore vengeance.

Yesterday Pansy stood and made an announcement of her own.

"The Serpent's Guile will be teaching the New Marauders just how pranking should be done." Severus Snape looked outraged but Pernelle Flamel seemed amused. McGonagal stood and spoke for a few minutes on the subject of pranking.

"All of us enjoy a clever prank. All should be aware that any mean spirited or hateful pranks will be punished. If you wouldn't want it to happen to you don't do it to anyone else. I should also remind the student body that we have a vast institutional knowledge of pranks. I am therefore entering The Professors Assembled into the war as referees. Should the spirit of the war drop into pettiness or bullying we will go on the hunt."

The glitter in Snape's eyes gave all pause.

This very morning the claws weighed in with their team the Brain Trust as well as the puffs with the Badgerers.

Harry was practicing with Flitwick and Remus in the Defense classroom after dinner. She was missing her timing and angry. Her training seemed flat and she was mad. Flitwick killed his saber and withdrew from the platform.

"Harriet I will leave you to finish with Remus." He gave a little bow and hurried away, shutting the door softly behind him.

"Alright cub, lets have it. You have something going on and it's eating at you badly."

Harry cursed and slashed at the wall with her saber. There was some tug, enough that she had to pull the blade along, but it cut the stone deep and long. She felt the castle become very annoyed with her. Harry cast the repair charm and laid her hand on the centuries old stonework, sending an apology and a promise.

"Remus everything is so incredibly fouled up beyond all redemption that I don't even know how to start!"

Harry coughed and blushed. Gryffindors forward. She gathered her courage and her breath.

"I have always loved Hermione, always. Then on the train George puts me in his lap and looks at me and I'm mush. IT MAKES NO SENSE! I can't talk to him about any of it cause he can't keep his mind shut. He won't be able to for months, maybe years. Hermione seems to be getting on great with Fred. We haven't talked about her and Fred but it seems like the same thing happened to her, just out of the blue they were really, really interested in one another. It's just so messed up in so many dimensions Remus I don't know what to do! How can I want to be with George and be jealous of Hermione being with Fred? How can I ever tell George I was born male, and can be male at the drop of a hat? I would hate to lose him because of how I was born, and I never want to lose Hermione at all and it looks like I am. THE IDIOT MADE AN UNBREAKABLE VOW TO KEEP MY SECRETS! I had to make one that anything he knew or found out about me wasn't a secret, he was free to tell whoever whatever. If he hadn't made me so mad I would have snogged him stupid for it. Stupider."

By now she was crying, not the quiet little sniffs of Hollywood but the nose messy floods of real pain.

Remus gathered her in and she really let go, howling confusion and misery for minute after minute.

"It was all so much easier before the Express." She had the hiccups now. He gave her his hanky for clean up operations. He took her by the hand once she had settled a bit and led her from the Defense classroom and into the staffs quarters. He knocked on the door of the Flamel's suite.

Harry was watching him like he had grown an extra head.

"Remus? Why are we here?"

Remus was an old wolf and suspicious. His cubs were acting very oddly indeed. He didn't understand the dramatic attraction on the Express. It was contrary to all he knew of his girls.

Nicholas answered the door.

"Remus? What brings you here at this hour? Ahh young Miss Pomfrey, how nice to see you. How can I help you?"

Remus steered Harry over the threshold and into the living room, guided her to a couch and sat beside her.

"I have just heard an interesting tale Nicholas. I would like your opinion of it. It is Harry's story so I will only be giving you an overview, could you give me your opinion of the tale?"

"But of course my friend, let us hear this tale."

Remus drew the very broad outlines of the journey of the Express for Nicholas.

"Harry it is true that you felt no attraction to this young man before this day?"

She shrugged. She didn't like where this was leading her at all.

"I have always like George, he's a good guy, nice and funny. Not in that way though."

"And on this day you suddenly felt an almost overpowering desire for him and need to be with him?"

Again she had to nod.

"This despite being in the presence of one you have loved for years?"

Once more a nod.

"Just a moment my dear, I must obtain some of my equipment."

Nicholas bustled away into the back of the suite returning with a case that looked very much like an old fashioned doctors bag. He drew out some ingredients and began to mix them over a small flame. Quite quickly he handed her a small beaker of brownish sludge with the instruction to drink it. He brewed a larger batch that he divided into thirds.

"What I have made is a rather broad spectrum potion designed to negate the effects of love or attraction potions. Your tale makes little sense unless one posits an outside force. That one young lady would find herself hopelessly smitten by a young man despite a previous commitment is possible. That two would at exactly the same time in exactly the same place is the height of absurdity. Let us go call upon the others of your menage."

"Do not feel too badly young Miss, the gentleman who made the Unbreakable Vow almost certainly had nothing to do with the scheme. If that is so, then it is very likely that his twin also had no part in it."

They had started on their way to Gryffindor tower, but Remus had guided them off into a little used corridor, he knew the scent of his girls and Hermione was somewhere along this corridor. Remus kept a loud conversation going with Nicholas so that the youngsters had plenty of chance to avoid him having to tear the Weasley boy limb from limb for touching his cub. Remus pulled the party to a stop before a ratty old tapestry and announced that he would like to see them. There was a soft sigh, a cough and a shuffle. Hermione and Fred eased from behind the tapestry which evidently did not cover a blank wall as it pretended. Both were rather red of face and a bit shifty eyed. Wordlessly Remus handed the two a potion vial apiece.

"Drink up."

Nicholas nodded happily. They drank. It was a few minutes and almost imperceptible, but they shifted apart just a bit. Harry's heart did backflips.

"And so to complete the task let us find the other Mr. Weasley, then we can perhaps find out how this was done."

The group tramped off to the Gryffindor tower. Fred went in and returned with a very puzzled twin in short order.

"Drink"

Fred nodded at him and so he drank. His eyes dilated several sizes and he flushed, glancing at Harry.

"Bon. Let us go and find an accommodation where we might discover what, where, when, who, and how."

They were soon in an empty classroom gathered in a loose circle. Harry started to breathe again when she felt Hermione's hand slip into hers and give a soft squeeze. Remus glanced, glanced away and fought a smile.

Professor Flamel began the discussion.

"I can hazard a guess as to what. There is a potion that will cause infatuation on contact. All that is required is that skin that has been exposed to the potion touch another's skin and a powerful infatuation will occur."

Fred spoke up.

"Well I can say where, how, and when. We got summoned into the baggage car from the platform and landed in a mess. We broke something landing on a pile of rucksacks. We scrambled about getting up and must have dosed ourselves. We headed pretty much straight to Harry's compartment to get desplintered. Hermione did me and Harry did George. This does explain quite a lot. You are two of the better looking birds in this coop there is no doubt but the intensity was..."

Fred shut his mouth. He figured he had said enough judging by the grinding his foot was taking from his twin.

George took over.

"Girls I think this sets new records for awkwardness. I am sorry to hear that it was chemically induced as I very much enjoy being closer to you both. I propose we move forward into a bright new future of friendship, perhaps with benefits.

Fred gave him an very exaggerated series of nudges and winks

"As the New Marauders we are committed to a major prank war. And we have suffered grievously even if our injuries were self inflicted. Can we find out who was smuggling in that potion? I think a little something headed that way might be time well spent."

"A noble sentiment brother mine. Might I add, Hermione you are a brilliant kisser. Should you ever find an attraction for me that isn't induced by outside influences your application for the position will be most favorably viewed"

The git swept a courtly bow, ending up sprawling with a swift boot from his former partner behind the scene.

Anyone wandering along that corridor would have seriously questioned the sanity of the six people hanging on to one another and howling with laughter. When Remus could breathe again he spoke up.

"I had some of the guys from the village helping with the baggage, I will ask if anyone remembers who claimed the leaky rucksack."

With that they split up for their separate destinations, Gryffindor tower, the Flamel's suite of rooms, and the Mayors residence. The girls walked with hands joined and a twin on either arm. It still felt damn good to Harry.

Disclaimer: JKR and associated corporations own Harry Potter. I do not.

Chapter 15 Runic Pajamas

Harry fell in to a regular beat of classes and study. The rip current of hormones that had nearly drown her subsided with the antidote to whatever potion George had bumbled into. The girls were much closer to the twins now even if not part of their immediate circle. The twins were fun and kind but the constant motion was wearing for a soul that rather enjoyed companionable quiet.

It was a few weeks into the term, the prank war was raging with no clear leader. Harry was curled on her bed, wand in hand, tracing runes onto a pair of black silk pajamas. Hermione was propped against the headboard of her bed occasionally glancing over to watch Harry's progress. If there was one thing Hermione hated it was not knowing.

"Harry just what are you doing to those pajamas?"

"Putting runes on them Mione."

"Yes dearheart, anyone could tell that. The real question is why are you putting runes on pajamas?"

"Oh. Your curious are you? You want to know do you?"

She glowered and returned to her studies. Harry watched as her fussing and restlessness increased. Any second now.

Hermione launched herself onto Harry tickling madly while Harry flailed. Even expecting the attack she was taken by surprise and surprise is all in a tickle fight. Harry dropped her wand and escalated the battle, it was pillows in the trenches now.

Hogwarts provided wonderful beds and lovely soft pillows, perfect for the weary heads of budding scholars. The pillows were no match for the vigorous pounding the two hellions were giving them. The fight ended in a mushroom cloud of down. Gasping with laughter they reparioed and scourgified the room into something like order. Without house elves to see to the needs of the students there was a growing self reliance aided by judicious detentions.

"Really Harry what are you doing with those pajamas?"

"Really Mione I am putting runes on them."

Harry showed Hermione her work. She had put the same rune on the pajamas over and over, they were covered in a Norse rune that was used to draw magical power.

"But Harry if you wear them they will drain off your magic."

"That is the point Mione. We got a huge boost in magical power from the goddess when we did the ritual. Compared to most everyone we have a LOT of magic. When we were in the love room at the Ministry our magic got refined, purified. When we cast with intent we can cast really powerful spells. So we have a lot and its top notch stuff. You know that magical power grows as people age until they are fully adult, then stays at that level for the rest of their lives until they are very old, when they start to lose power. So what I'm thinking is that I want to make my magic grow as much as I can while it is increasing. I don't know if it is a percentage increase as you age or a standard amount, but I want to push for all I can get. I hope if I drain off as much of my magic as I can as often as I can I will adapt to recharge faster. Then I'm going to save what I drain off and take it back hoping to adapt to store more. What do you think?"

"I think your crazed about the reabsorbing part. That sounds really dangerous. You had better let your Auntie know before you try that so she can keep you safe, The draining might work, I have never heard of it being done before. We need to hit the library."

Harry grinned. The answer to all questions was not 42, it was the library. Hermione inspected Harry's work on the pajamas and agreed that the runes would absorb magic. They discussed how to store the overage. There didn't seem to be a good answer they were aware of, it was tabled for their next Ancient Runes class.

Hermione and Harry sat with parchment trying to calculate just how much magic her runic pajamas would leach from her in a night having fun with the puzzle.

The next day Harry woke up a bit out of sorts, feeling the pull from the pajamas. She had no trouble with her classes, having plenty of

magical reserve to do her course work. She was shocked to find just how much her magic had aided her physical workout. By the end of her day she was very tired and more than ready for bed.

The first week was the worst. Hermione finally convinced her to give the runic PJ's a break. Her argument was that, just like weight training, it was possible to over train and do more damage than good. By the end of the week the PJ's were deeply magical. The other girls had watched the experiment with interest and a bit of skepticism. Everyone was tiptoeing around the PJ's like they were a bomb on a hair trigger.

Professor Babbling, the Ancient Runes instructor, had shown them the basic rune for storing magical power but they had yet to locate appropriate material on which to engrave the rune. Harry finally just etched the rune on the wall over her bed. She held the PJ's to the rune and murmured the activation spell. There was a faint smell of ozone and the sense of unease dropped dramatically in the third year girls dorm. Harry had a distinct impression that Hogwarts sniffed at her. The castle hadn't quite forgiven Harry for cutting into her during the George debacle. Harry sent another apology. There really was no excuse for her behavior that day.

For Hermione's birthday Harry gave her a set of runic PJ's, a vast amount of chocolate, and a voucher for the Flourish and Blott's bookstore to be redeemed on their first Hogsmeade weekend. Their friends had all gotten her something. She was touched and surprised at the outpouring of affection during her birthday party in the Gryffindor common room. Even two years on and after all their adventures Hermione half expected shunning. Harry tried to tell her daily how many other great things she was than scary brilliant. She hadn't yet been able to fully convince Mione. After the party in the common room was over the girls headed off to bed. Hermione was changed into her new PJ's and sitting looking at her presents, her face soft and wondering. Harry sat down beside her and laid her head on Mione's shoulder snaking an arm around her waist. Hermione leaned into her with a little sigh. She smelled of clean and vanilla and books. Mione was hesitant as she slipped her arm around Harry. They sat quietly for a while just holding one another and staring ahead at nothing. Harry felt a glowing peace that was so very comfortable and right.

"Happy birthday sweetie."

Harry kissed Mione on the temple and started to her feet. To her very great pleasure and surprise Hermione kept Harry next to her. The other girls, who had been bustling about getting ready for bed, seemed to sense something and the room grew still. Hermione turned to face Harry and put a hand to her cheek. Her thumb traced Harry's prominent cheekbone and the edge of her ear, softly, so softly. Hermione leaned forward those few inches between them and their lips met. Harry was on fire and frozen. There had certainly been an erotic rush kissing George, his strength and the fire of his desire had fueled hers. This was different. This was coming home on a cold day to a hot fire and a loving hand. The kiss wasn't long, or fierce, or especially special to anyone else but the two sharing it.

It was Pavarti that broke the silence with a thundering gust of a sigh.

"Finally. If you two hadn't managed soon we were going to tie you together and lock the room. This is not something I would choose for myself, but you are our friends and if your happy, we are happy for you. It would be grand if you kept the gory details to yourselves." Lavander just grinned at them.

"Oh the boys will be so disappointed!"

Over the past weeks Harry had "upgraded the firmware" for their friends. Neville, Ron, Luna, Ginny, and Fred were all sense enhanced and reflex boosted.

The New Marauders had stayed in the background watching the prank war sweep around them. The Serpents Guile had done well when all of Ravenclaw ended every sentence spoken with a hiss. The Brain Trust had struck back. Their response was unimaginative but certainly effective. All of Slytherin talked backwards for a day. They could understand one another but it was very difficult for anyone else to make sense of them. Not all of them seemed to think this a bad thing. The Badgerers did well with a charm that had everyone skipping. It took a few hours to sort out the charm. The sight of the Headmistress skipping down the hall was enough to halt traffic. She found it difficult in the extreme to maintain her icy aloofness before the red faced sniggering students.

The New Marauders were stuck for ideas. Harry sent an owl on a mission to recruit expert advisers. After all this was war. Technical advisers from a super power were expected. Sirius answered the tapping of the Hogwarts owl at the window.

"Moony old man, we have been called up. It's technical advice and inspiration time. Our presence is requested and required in support of the New Marauders."

Sirius brushed aside a non existent tear.

"How soon they leave the nest. Still we are needed. What say, you mangy cur?"

Remus cast a jaundiced eye on his best friend. Sirius had come out of the storming of Azkaban greatly healed. Some of his darkness had left with the shade of the last Dementor. Occasionally he would be grim and distant but less frequently now. He was healing and taking an interest again. He was focused on the future instead of his grim past.

"What do they need Sirius? Technical assistance or inspiration?"

"Inspiration first old man, then we can see what they do with our ideas. Do you think we should have dinner with them at the Three Broomsticks and see what develops?"

Remus nodded and scribbled a reply on the back of Harry's note, tied it to the school owl and sent her on her short flight back.

Most of the twins pranks had dealt with potions. Harry and Hermione were currently fascinated with runes. The original flavor Marauders had used charms and transfiguration. Still what was funny was always funny. The originals were recalling their favorite pranks from their school years that might fit the groups skill set, after all if it was post NEWT level magic the gang might have a tough time of it.

Finally they had something they liked. It would be a lot harder to dose the food with Molly Weasley in the kitchen instead of a few hundred harried house elves. So they dosed a barrel of pickles before it got to Hogwarts. Remus stood watch as Sirius did the dirty deed. The twins pulled a distraction leading the night watch away from the Great Hall while the girls worked with runes and a

vanishing ink. The runes were very low powered, they just tagged people as odd or even as they came into the Hall and implanted a suggestion.

It worked pretty well. Whoever ate pickles became one of a "charged set". The set went active when the potion left the dosed persons system. After the set was active when one of the charged pair started to talk the other would blurt out "Marauders". Then the effect toggled so the other of the pair would blurt "Marauders" at the first sound from their paired partner. A quick finite would restore order until the next time pickles were served.

The more ingredients they got altered and in use the more often the effect was triggered. Snape was not pleased to have his Defense class disrupted by the nonsense blurting of the name of his hated rivals.

It was hellish to track down and stop.

During dinner at the Three Broomsticks Remus mentioned the leaky rucksack that had led to the Fred and George incident was picked up by Millicent Blisters. Harry swore everyone to secrecy saying she would handle it herself.

Harry caught Millie just after Potions one day and asked her to talk for a minute.

"Millie what was the story on that attraction potion? It ended up on the Weasley twins, Hermione and I had a good bit of trouble sorting out effects."

"Harry, look at me, I'm no pixie. I'm not cute like you and Hermione. If I am to get a good man I need to work a lot harder than you."

Harry did look at Millie. She was definitely no pixie, she was a large girl to be charitable and broad shouldered. She also was the unfortunate owner of a rather magnificent unibrow, one continuous eyebrow. It gave her a rather unevolved look. Her face was strong boned and her features all sharply defined. She had beautiful grey eyes.

"Well Millie I don't think I'm cute to be honest, I've got a face like an ax with eyes. I don't think I've ever talked to a woman under 80 that liked how they looked."

"Oh trust me Harry, your cute, even in the snakes den they know that."

Harry shrugged.

"Why the worry about a guy Millie, like someone said women need men like fish need bicycles."

"What's a bicycle?"

"Never mind, it's a muggle thing. I never really agreed with it anyway. It's just a saying that women don't need men to be complete in themselves."

"That may be true Harry for the muggle world, and even for the magical world but I have a betrothal in my future if I can't make arrangements for myself. My father will betroth me to advance our family interest."

"So is there someone your interested in Millie?"

"This is getting pretty personal Harry, I like you, but your asking a lot. Is there someone your interested in?"

Harry nodded, point taken.

"I am interested in Hermione. Please keep that to yourself. I'm not ashamed, and neither is she, but less trouble is less trouble."

"That makes us almost like friends Potter."

"Something very like it, almost indistinguishable from it. You ok with that Millie?"

Millie smiled. She didn't do it often and that might be the reason she looked vulnerable and shy doing it. Her face lit and Harry could see for a second past the unibrow and her anti-Slytherin bias to a lonely girl with not a lot of hope or future.

"There is a group of us that work out every morning. Please meet us in the Spa at six tomorrow. I don't think you need to use potions Millie, you are a good person and a good friend. Meet us tomorrow at six."

"You think it would help?"

"You can never go wrong being stronger Millie, think that's in the Slytherin handbook."

The Gryffindors that made the early workout the next day found a quite nervous Millie already in Salazar's Spa gaping at the mundane training machines. She was in her school robes so everyone pulled together to get her something she could move around in. She stuck close to Harry and Hermione at first. Harry had warned the others that Millie might show and had asked that they give her a break.

Harry set her up on an easy routine working towards conditioning first and foremost. Soon Millie was toiling up the idiot hill of a stair stepper along with the rest of them. They usually didn't talk a lot, no one had breath for it. Harry made sure Millie had a pain relief potion for the next morning, she would be super sore after her workout.

Millie continued to show up and train with them, quickly becoming much stronger. Her body mass started to shift as muscle replaced fat. She would eventually be very statuesque. The group was pretty quick to accept her, she was a nice girl for a snake. Millie for her part remained a bit guarded, less so as time went on. In a few weeks meeting her at the Spa was normal and expected.

The next Hogsmeade weekend Harry asked Millie to meet the girls of the morning work out at a beauticians shop. The girls were in for some pampering and in the case of Millie a makeover. Magic is a wonderful thing. The witch had trimmed Millie's eyebrows back easily and was happy to teach her the charm to do it for herself. The girls clustered around as makeup was tried and judged. They had lunch at the Three Broomsticks then did a bit of clothes shopping. Lavender and Parvati guided Millie toward some choices they thought looked good on her.

Millie looked very different that night at dinner. She caught a lot of attention, not all of it good. Pansy wasn't about to have the ground shift under her without some attempt at stabilization. Her hold on

Slytherin had weakened after Harry had so soundly beaten Draco, an affair that Millie had part in. The Ministry was winnowing Death Eaters with careful trials and the damn Queen had Unbreakable Vows from the Wizengamot. Pansy felt she was on a shrinking island. The Gryffindor's couldn't hear the confrontation, Millie and Pansy were whispering, but the next day Millie wasn't at the Spa for the morning workout. She hadn't missed a day since she started coming. The young lions went on alert.

Typical Gryffindor behavior would have Harry march right up to Millie and start questioning. Harry took a page from the snake's handbook and slipped a note into Millie's bag as they passed one another leaving Potions. It was the right choice.

Late that night Harry crept into a storeroom near the Slytherin common room entrance. The twins had often used it to stage their pranks. Millie was waiting.

"Are you doing alright Millie? I don't mean to be in your business but all of us will be happy to help you if you need us." Millie felt the true concern and warmth in Harry's voice.

"Some of it is snake business Harry, I'll handle that. Slytherin is at a tipping point. We have always been at the throats of the Gryffs and the Gryffs at us. If you can get your house to pull back on that, I think I can get mine to. Pansy is about to go down, she's the lead of the power structure that was Death Eater dominated, and it isn't going so well for them with the trials and all. I can lead the moderates into control, but we need the Gryffs to show that it will work. Can you deliver?"

"When do you need this Millie?"

"As soon as you can, just waiting on you. I was working tight in my house last night, that's why I missed the workout. Pansy is ripe, I won't even have to hurt her to move her out of the way."

"How about some Gryff friends share breakfast with you at the Snake table tomorrow?"

"That works Harry. Don't take this wrong but it shouldn't be you and Hermione. The purebloods aren't much for people like you two. It shouldn't be the lot of you either, just two. No offense, just saying."

"None taken Millie. How about Lav and Ron?"

Millie laughed.

"You think Weasley will sit nice with me at the Snake table Harry? You've lost your mind!"

"He used to be a bit of a wanker Millie but he's a lot better now."

Harry couldn't wait to deliver the next part.

"He's got a thing for you. He responds well to clear direction. If you tell him to behave and make it clear you expect him too, he most likely will. At least so long as no one has a go at his family or friends. He'll fire up quick then."

Sure enough Millie blushed a good deal on hearing of Ron's interest in her. He had always watched her, at first to be sure she was on the level, later because she was fun to watch. She had toned up very well indeed. Last night he had barely eaten for staring. He seemed to be struck speechless by her new look.

They agreed to meet for the morning workout. Harry melted into the shadows and made her way back to the tower. She had some canvassing to do. Her first stop was at Professor Vector's office. Harry asked for a House meeting that evening. The Professor was happy to oblige once Harry made clear the objective of the meeting.

It was a short meeting with plenty of comment from the peanut gallery. A lot of the upperclassmen seemed miffed that an ickle third was asking them to do anything, much less back off the snakes. Harry was really happy for her Head's support. Professor Vector was definite telling the lions that they could stand down for a week and then reassess.

"You don't have to kiss them. I do want you to give this a chance to work. I do expect you to defeat them soundly on the playing field and academically. Yes academically! For too long Gryffindor has meant long on courage and short on brains. Dumb brave people are called dead. Don't let it happen to you."

They laughed, but they listened.

Harry got Lavender and Ron aside and asked them to go to breakfast with Millie the next morning to show the flag. Ron was wanted to grumble about the snakes coming to them but Harry eased around that by suggesting he was a wee bit scared of taking the first step. Lions to the front. Lavender was happy to try, they had some cute boys in the snake pit, Zabini in particular was good looking.

It was a very interesting breakfast. A Weasley eating with a Slytherin was likely to make the Daily Prophet if nothing big was on for the day. Millie and Ron were side by side, Lav across from them. Harry and Hermione sat facing the Snakes table with a weather eye out.

Pansy tried for trouble with her blood traitor rant but Professor Flamel had her quiet in very short order. Millie introduced her guests to several of her housemates and while guarded the talk did loosen up with boys chattering about Quidditch and the girls about the boys. Ron took his usual bollocking for supporting the Cannons. He was as bad as a Cubs fan. The very definition of hope springing eternal.

From then on most days Ron would eat breakfast with Millie and Millie would join them for lunch. Dinner the hands sat pat. There was a slow cross pollination going on, the extra clubs, the inter-mural Quidditch league had all helped make this possible.

It was late October, a time of year Harry hated. She always got a bit morose and grouchy around Halloween. She was sitting with her Auntie Poppy doing some homework and enjoying some family time when Hermione walked in. Harry and she had been wearing the runic pajamas for a several weeks now. Hermione was interested in answers as to their effect. Auntie Poppy cast some measuring spells and compared them to the base lines she had for both girls. She was very surprised to find that it was working. Their speed of regeneration was appreciably higher than that of their cohort, even allowing for their larger reserve. She cleared them to try to stretch their reserves so long as she was present to supervise. Harry glared daggers at Hermione. She hadn't told her Aunties about the runic PJs. There were a few things she hadn't told them about. Like her flowering romance with Hermione. And the skullduggery with the Slytherins. There were things they needed know as well. Harry called for a family meeting that weekend.

They met at the Farm, the Aunties, Remus, Sirius, Hermione, Harry, Dobby, and Limpy. The elves hadn't been invited, but had appeared to the very great pleasure of them all.

"Harry I think you called this meeting would you please open it for us?"

Harry nodded at her Headmistress and began.

"Since the battle at Azkaban we have been pretty much going by the seat of our pants." She wrapped a long arm around Hermione. "Our training is haphazard at best. We are pretty much self directed at this point and we really don't know enough to know how to direct ourselves. There are some things we need to know pretty soon. Does the prophecy still apply? What part will the elves take in our world and how can we help them? Have the measures we took to help the werewolves been effective, if not what needs to change? How is the cleansing of the Ministry going? What about the Malfoys? What remains of Riddles organization to dismantle? How are we doing in finally getting rid of him for good and all?"

The adults blinked a minute. Minerva turned to the floo and threw a pinch of powder into the flames. "Albus Dumbledore!"

"Minerva what a pleasure! Hello to you all! May I step through? I would like to speak to all of you, it is most convenient to find you neatly gathered."

Dumbledore stepped gracefully through the flue looking chipper and excited. Poppy got him a hot chocolate and settled him into a soft chair.

Harry spoke first.

"Winter is coming will the elves have cover against the weather? Do your people need anything Dobby, Limpy?"

"We do need quite a bit Harry, we need weapons and building materials. We can hunt for food and barter our work for those things we can not get by hunting. There was a great store of weapons put away for this time when the treaty was originally signed. I had mentioned that we would need wizards help. It is to get the weapons of old we will need wizards. We have found a place in the Forest

that will be our home, you have been there with Hagrid, the surrounding area must be cleansed of dark creatures. The acromantula's in particular are a danger to us we must confront. We don't have the weapons to be able to do that."

Minerva spoke as the Headmistress. "Send your troops to the school Dobby, as you know, there are storerooms full of weapons. They will not be those of your birthright but they should serve for this late season."

Remus spoke next. "Potter Construction has a lot of material available Dobby, I am sure Harry wouldn't mind bartering it for future services. I had stocked up on the liquidations of several dark families seeking to pay for solicitors." His grin had a definite wolfish cast.

"Between the school, the village and the elves we might form a cooperative to share our products and lower our costs. Perhaps we could get Hogsmeade interested as well."

Harry spoke again.

"How are the werewolves doing Remus? What more can we do to help?"

"Things are going pretty well Harry. With the elves becoming independent we have been able to work a lot more. A lot of the extra income has gone into improving the village, you should come and see it, it's changed in the last months. We aren't getting many new infections, I think because there aren't a lot of people being turned. Some werewolves are still living wild in the forest, and that will need to be dealt with soon. I'm afraid once the labor crunch is over the tolerance we are experiencing will go with it."

"How is the cleansing of the Ministry going Headmaster?"

Dumbledore smiled at his old title. He heard it constantly. He did miss his friends at the castle but the work he was doing now was fascinating to him. If only that annoying Q would stop telling him to pay attention.

"We have been successful in getting Unbreakable Vows from every member of the DMLE, the Aurors, the Wizengamot and are working

our way through the Department of International Cooperation. We will next target the Floo Authority and the Underage Magic Department. Arthur is prepared to submit a bill that elevates the other sentient magical creatures to equal status with humans. The Queen has made plain that this bill will pass. Arthur will submit the bill on Monday. I'm sorry Harry but he can use memory of your parents sacrifice to ease the bill along. Even if the members must vote for it, many of them don't want to.

Her Majesty has taken quite a liking to Mad Eye, she insists on a daily briefing from him. I think she sees him as her Drake. Another few months should have the Ministry cleansed if smarting from the scrubbing. Rather like cleaning a grubby child.

I have been tasked with covert oversight of the magical world. While Amelia comes through the front door I go out the back. Sirius, Alastor and I are all having an enormous amount of fun ferreting out the remains of Riddles infrastructure. Not much remains that we are aware of. We expect to have all that any of his people know about cleaned up by the new year. Any other assets, and there will be some of those, will be known only to him. The Crown has acceded to our request for reeducation of the Death Eaters. Her Majesty was most reluctant until she had viewed the pensive memories of Bellatrix Lestrange. Her Majesty is certainly the most unflappable woman in the world, quite something.

Reports on Riddle are vague. The last confirmed sighting of him was at Azkaban. He may have as many as five marked Death Eaters still at large in magical Britannia. We expect that he will not attempt to raise his standard here, but rather on the continent where the soil is now more fertile for him.

I have been remiss in my investigation of the reason for his spirit to be bound to this plain. It has been my thought to do what we know to do before we spend resources searching for his anchors to this world."

Harry stared at the Headmaster bug eyed. He had said more with less dissimulation than at any time in her experience.

"Am I still subject to the prophecy Headmaster?"

He sighed. "I believe that you are Miss Pomfrey. That you have lived your life as female doesn't change that he marked you. At that time you were male as the prophecy demanded. The rest of the prophecy is not gender specific. As to the power he knows not you have certainly opened some interesting options. You have not only been blessed of the goddess but have been purified in the Love room at the Ministry. I shall have to speak to Her Majesty. The Love room sounds like a suite in a bad hotel."

He missed the laugh he was going for and to cover Dumbledore cast some diagnostic spells over the girls. His wild eyebrows rose quite a bit at the answers.

"What have you done now young ladies? You are markedly stronger than you were months ago, much more than can be explained by the usual maturation of your magic."

Harry explained the Runic Pajamas. Dumbledore regarded her fondly.

"Always with you there is a surprise. I shall have some of this fabulous sleepwear. Could you show me the runes you used?"

Hermione made a quick sketch of the rune. Dumbledore countered with another and they were off into a technical discussion for a bit while the others relaxed and watched them with amusement. They became steadily more excited until they were finishing each others thoughts in a rush of discovery and argument.

It was Harry laughing that stopped them. They looked up with wide eyes, coming back from the far distance.

"Harry! We can change one of the runes and stabilize the storage so that they can't discharge accidentally! And we can store the excess in the goddess staves until we need it, then call it up, they should hold all we can put in them according to the professor!"

Harry just grinned at her. She was lovely and flushed with excitement.

Sirius spoke at last.

"I will deal with the Malfoys. With the sad passing of Lucy its down to my cousin and her brat. I will annul her marriage to Lucy and allow her back into the Black family if she gives an Unbreakable Vow to never support Voldemort again. The same for Draco. If he will make that vow I will accept him as a Black. I think that Arthur would end the blood feud under those conditions. The Weasleys will find themselves very much richer for it, which will be a nice thing. Can't think of anyone better to have the Malfoy money than Molly and Arthur."

Harry took the floor again.

"The last thing is our training. We are not pushing. There is only so much time before Tommy boy comes knocking again. If it's down to me to kill him, well, I don't think I can stand against him as he was. Pettigrew I could beat, Voldemort no. I could likely escape almost no matter what between the goddess gear, the sabers, and elven popping. But I would hate to test it. Can we see memories of his fights? It would help to see how he works."

Sirius put on his godfather hat and Harry's Aunties puffed up.

A sleet storm of suggestions for the girls training washed over them. Albus offered to see who in Her Majesties service might be available to train them in hand to hand physical conditioning. He suggested the Nicholas and Perenelle as an untapped resource, as well as the elves. Elven battle magic was legend in the magical world. Dobby hoped to recover some of that knowledge when they recovered their heirloom weapons.

They had a plan of action. Arthur would introduce the bill elevating the other sentient species to be equal with humans before the law. Albus would find a trainer for the girls and their friends. The elves would draw stores of weapons from Hogwarts and materials for shelter from the werewolf village. A great hunt would take place in the next week to clear the dark creatures from the Forbidden Forest. In the not distant future Dobby and Limpy would led a group to recover the heirlooms of their people. The Ministry would be cleansed by the New Year of Death Eater cells. Nicholas and Perenelle would be asked to help prepare the girls for combat against Riddle in his full form.

Finally Harry dropped her bomb. "I would like to visit my parents grave, ideally on Halloween."

The silence stretched until it was very thin indeed.

Auntie Minerva finally spoke.

"I fear this Harry. We will do it, but we will do it very carefully. I hope Bill Weasley is available. If he is not I would suggest hiring the very best curse breaker the goblins have for this visit."

Minerva turned to the fire and threw a bit of powder into it calling "Bill Weasley!"

She was in luck, the very good looking Bill was soon standing sipping his hot chocolate and exchanging happy hellos to all the folks present. He was available the next day and would be happy to help. They made plans for a late breakfast at the Bite in the werewolf village and then a quick hop to Godrick's Hollow.

The Hogwarts contingent made their way back to the school, easy enough to floo right to the Heads chambers while the rest of them adjourned for adult beverage in the case of the wizards, and their encampment in the case of Dobby and Limpy.

After the last of what they would fondly remember as the easy workouts the girls watched the elves march to Hogwarts for a weapons issue. Ten groups of one hundred were armed with sword, spear, bow, shield and some even with armor. They marched back into the forest past a very worried looking Hagrid.

The girls felt quite like Hobbits as they had a second breakfast at the Bite. The food was good and the company better, Bill the girls, Minerva, Sirius and Remus. Poppy wanted to come but felt she should stay at the school with the number of sports going on and the rapprochement between the snakes and the lions so new.

Godric's Hollow was small and quiet. The group moved along, led by Remus and Sirius, towards the cemetery. Bill moved ahead and started to slowly quarter the area. He muttered several times causing flashes of various light. He seemed relaxed and alert, completely professional. Slowly he worked his way forward testing carefully for traps, occasionally disarming one. His progress slowed

as he neared the Potter plots. Everyone was quiet letting him work. His wand danced and waved as he muttered in some language that wasn't english or even latin. It was a long time before he was happy with his results. He stood back and turned to them.

"It was very heavily warded. Nasty wards to. They were blood wards, if either of you had touched the headstone I doubt that you would have survived. To fully test that they are gone I will need a bit of your blood Harry."

Harry offered her hand, Bill made a quick slice and tossed a few drops on the stone and the ground around it. The droplets to hit the headstone smoked and burned.

Harry healed her hand as Bill went back to work, clearing the remaining curses. It was several minutes more with Harry half watching Bill and half looking at the place where her parents mortal remains were interred. It was an old church graveyard dating back centuries full of crumbling stones worn to illegibility by age and element. It seemed so plain that it was comforting, like Hermione's arm around her and her head on her shoulder. She was holding Harry close, watching Bill work, trying to translate the spells.

Bill was ready for another test. Harry cut herself a bit and tossed droplets of blood onto the graves and marker. There was no reaction now. Clumsy with cold and emotion she knelt at the graveside of her parents.

"Um, Hi. I'm Harry, and well you probably know this but I'm a girl now, Auntie Minerv and Auntie Poppy adopted me after the Dursleys messed me up pretty bad. This is Hermione, shes brilliant and beautiful and I think I love her. I hope you are ok with that. I hope you can love her too, she is worth it. I haven't been before, well cause until a few years ago we lived in San Francisco so there wasn't a way until recently. Its almost Halloween now, the anniversary of you murders. Dumbledore says its down to me to finish him. Hermione is going to help as well as a lot of other people. We have been doing good taking away his base. He will have a lot harder time becoming a threat now. I wish I had known you and you had known Hermione. Shes the best thing in my life now, along with the Aunties and the elves, Dobby and Limpy. I just wanted to finally see you and tell you how I wish it was different but that it isn't bad

and you shouldn't worry. I love you and hope your happy and happy for us."

Harry kissed her fingers and laid them on the headstone. For a moment it seemed that there was laughter in the distance, and love close by.

Chapter 16 Of Hunts and Hopes

Disclaimer: JKR owns Harry Potter. I don't.

Hermione fought for concentration. She had a ton of work to do and not a lot of time to do it in. Secretly she was glad that her class schedule had been trimmed. Sighing she finished the potions essay and turned to her transfiguration homework. She glanced at Harry, working away at some project surrounded by books and messy notes in random piles. Harry was scowling at her text, obviously irked by it. She could get most astonishingly angry at inanimate objects Harry could.

Hermione had never thought a girl would fall in love with her. To be truthful she hadn't thought anyone would love her at all. Not romantically. Hermione was too smart, too opinionated, the last thing from docile. If you pulled her string the last thing she would say ever was "Math is hard". Somehow she was the beloved of that black haired she-demon over in the other chair.

She didn't know what all that added up to and that bothered her. A lot. Hermione needed to know. Harry and she were attracting a lot of attention around school now. The rumor mill had them hooked up at the very least. The looks in the hall, the muttering as they walked to class that had never bothered her before burned now. Before it hadn't been true and so couldn't hurt. Now it was true, and it did hurt. Harry was beginning to lose patience with it. Always before she was a duck and insults were water on her back. Now her eyes were getting hard, and her lips thin.

Even in their dorm, there was a strain. Lavender and Pavarti had been initially supportive but had turned much cooler. Harry touched her less by far than she had before that kiss a week ago on her birthday. It took a different courage to face the school day after day than it did to say it once loud and proud. She glanced again at Harry, catching her eye, feeling the quick rush of something, some emotion, some feeling that didn't have a name that fit. They stared just a second, just a half beat longer than others would, lips quirked up just a tiny bit, warmth passed back and forth.

If it was only them, would that be enough?

"Sweet Merlin I'm fourteen, how can I know what I want? I'm fourteen and have killed ten times that number. Twice I've stood in the center of a snowdrift of corpses and been glad to breathe. I've seen the most important person in my world walk out into deadly danger and survive by the luck of a saber toss. So having done that, faced that, been that, why do I care about the whispers, and the ever so slight shrinking away? But I do. There was a relief in Fred, he was expected. He came preapproved. This thing with Harry.. it isn't."

She fussed at her papers, ordering them for the last time, fighting to concentrate on either her homework or her life. Trying to work on both didn't seem to get either further along. Tomorrow would start their new physical training regimen. Moody had been entirely too pleased with himself about their new trainer. Hermione was sure that she needed to do a lot of the time consuming homework this evening. Tomorrow she would likely want all the sleep she could get.

"That's it for me Harry, I'm stuck. I'm headed up."

Harry gave her an up from under look. She nodded and tried a half smile and a bit of a shrug.

"I'll just finish this essay and be up Mione. See you in a bit."

Hermione nodded sharply and scooted for the stairs. There was that day almost done. She hurried through her bed preparations, a quick wash up, her teeth of course, and into bed. She tried to be casual and unhurried closing the curtains around her bed, no pressure or anxiety here, move along. She cleared her mind and began her Occulumenty practice. Snape had been getting insistent in his probes. Slowly she centered herself and drifted to stillness, the tensions of the day washing from her. Long since she had rigged a light so that she could read at night without disturbing her roommates. She picked up her History reading, always good for a nap, maybe it would send her off tonight without hours of struggle to get to sleep.

Their new hand to hand and physical conditioning trainer was a revelation in loathing. He was of some age where grey hair happened, some wrinkles on his face, none on his clothes. He was sneering as they entered the Spa. By the time their physical training was over any of the would have gladly cursed him if they had the

breath. Then he began their hand to hand lessons. He was larger than any of them, but not outrageously so. He beat them like red headed stepchildren. Only Harry and Hermione could land anything on him, and it never seemed to have an effect. They might as well have been in a pillow fight.

He on the other hand seemed to be able to cause pain just by breathing on them. He was an amazing fighter. Ron with his dedication to Tai Chi was able to last the longest, several minutes. The group would grow to hate him. Luna stared at him for minute after minute, she had never been so fascinated with anyone. They endured. When the training came to an end he announced that they were truly terrible and as such should plan on showing up earlier in the morning so that they would have some chance to eventually become at least somewhat competent in a fight.

Every one of them stopped by the infirmary for pain relief potions and pepper up.

Their classmates nudged them awake at the breakfast table and they were off for their daily instruction. Today was Potions, double Defense, double Transfiguration and Arithmancy. Professor Flamel was his usual self, cheery, kind and supportive. Snape was not his usual self. He seemed to have developed a sudden intense interest in Harry and Hermione. Snape never expressed interest in a pleasant way. He swooped and circled, heckling their every step. The girls were already fragile from the constant corridor harassment they were taking. Piled on top of that was the intense bollocking they had taken in the morning from their new instructor, a demon who had never even given them his name. Snape called Hermione to the front of the class. He was discussing the use of shields as opposed to dodging. He decided that a demonstration was in order.

"Ms. Granger, being a person of muggle birth and a deviant, will require substantial skill in avoiding the vengeance of her betters. You will find the magical world must less tolerant of your abnormalities than the muggles Ms. Granger. Prepare to defend yourself."

Snape said no more and began to cast at Hermione. The hours the girls had spent with Flitwick, Remus, Sirius, Albus, and Moody showed their worth. He couldn't hit her. The harder he tried, the angrier he got. Finally he was using area of effect spells, spells that

covered half the classroom. Hermione transfigured chairs and desks into blocks of stone able to protect her. She didn't say a word, didn't break a sweat, barely seemed to move. She was fire and she danced. Harry had never been so proud of her. When Snape moved into the area of effect spells Harry began to yell at him to stop. He heard Harry, no doubt of that, and his curses redoubled in strength and power. If Hermione was hit by any of them she would be at least seriously hurt. Harry waded into the fight beside her.

"Fuck this Mione, lets put him down, this had gone way to far."

As one their sabers lit off and they moved towards Snape, whirling and ducking. The glowing blades hissed and wove, blasting spells into the walls and ceilings. They were in blade range, both sabers took almost identical arcs. They met at Snape's wand snapping and crashing as the blades hit one another.

Snape held the handle, two pieces lay on the floor. He snarled and reached for Hermione. Harry went into overdrive. She could see his hand reaching for Mione. Harry's blade was already moving. In bits of a second Snape's arm would lie beside the pieces of his wand. Harry decided and killed the blade. Harry's fist crashed into Snape's throat, collapsing his airway and dumping him on his ass. The arm that had dared to reach for Mione would need some treatment. The saber had shut off just after contacting his arm, he would be in for a bad night with skelegrow and burn ointments. Hermione shut her blade down and stunned him. She was shaking, Harry could see her tremor.

"Go get the Headmistress and Madam Pomfrey someone."
Hermione looked around the room. "GO!"

Neville nodded and ran from the classroom. Harry leaned against a wall, one hand flat to the stone.

"I know your mad, but Hermione is in trouble, can you ask the Headmistress and Madam Pomfrey to come to this class and tell them we need Dumbledore as well?"

Harry couldn't tell if Hogwarts would do as she asked. The sick fear that had washed through her as Snape had escalated the fight was leaving her, and leaving her furious. Harry was shaking with rage as Hermione knelt and cast a healing charm on Snape's throat so that

he could breathe. Harry cast a charm to petrify him and then enervated him. His black eyes snapped open. He locked eyes with Hermione for a minute. She swayed back then frowned at him. His sneer disappeared, he looked a bit scared now.

Harry knelt beside him and grabbed his hair, jerking his head to face her.

"WHAT WHERE YOU THINIING! YOU COULD HAVE KILLED HER! WHY DID YOU DO THAT?"

His black eyes bored into hers. She felt the tickle of a mind attack. He should have never dared. She poured her rage and fear into the contact and rammed it back at him. He gasped and collapsed into unconsciousness. It was all she could do as she stood to not kick the hell out of him.

Several of the Slytherins, Pansy's crowd, were headed for the door of the classroom. Harry charmed the door closed and sealed it.

"No one leaves until the Headmistress gives her permission."

Some of them muttered, but none wanted to piss her off any more than she was. Those blades were scary stuff, not to mention that Hermione had easily held her own against Snape, one of the strongest wizards in Britannia. And when Harry had piled in? Forget it. The Slytherins sat back down and waited for the next act in the play. Parkinson provided it.

"Not even your deviant Aunts can save you from this one Pomfrey. You and your slut are going to be expelled and your Aunts will lose their jobs."

Harry was flushing adrenaline, shaking a bit and near tears.

"Pansy, how do you remember to breathe as stupid as you are? This is the grand plan? Have Snape mount a completely crazed attack on Hermione as an excuse to remove my Aunts and the two of us?"

Harry snorted and looked away from the idiot girl. She noticed that Millie was looking thoughtful. Something for later investigation.

The door gave a squelching noise and opened to admit the Headmistress, Madam Pomfrey, Neville, and Albus Dumbledore.

Harry pointed at Snape.

"He needs medical attention. He needs to be charged by DMLE also. We need an Auror here. Professor Dumbledore can you please analyze his wand?"

The Headmistress stared at Harry.

"I believe I am the Headmistress Miss Pomfrey, kindly be silent."

Poppy moved to Snape and started to heal his throat and arm. Albus murmured over the remains of Snape's wand.

Harry folded in on herself a bit and retreated nearer to Hermione. Hermione had her eyes closed, replaying the scene of the fight again, looking for clues as to its cause. Snape had never been pleasant, but he had never singled them out anymore than any other student. As time had passed, his bias towards Slytherin students had lessened. He was close to being equally unfair to everyone.

"What was his aim? Was this a completely illogical escalation of his dislike of lesbians? Or was there more here? Lesbian! One damn kiss and the world goes crazy! Why did he try to get into my mind?"

She replayed the mental attack slowly hoping to glean more information from it.

"What was he looking for? Why did he risk it? He took a terrible chance today, why? No matter what else his teaching career is over."

Minerva sighed and turned to Poppy.

"Move him to the infirmary Poppy. No one is to approach him until an Auror is present."

The Headmistress turned the beady eye on the rest of the class.

"Sit. You will each be interviewed by an Auror. Expect to spend some time in this classroom. There will be no talking or note passing. Albus are you done with your examination of Snape's wand?"

Dumbledore nodded meekly.

"Would you do me the honor of securing this room and it's witnesses pending the arrival of Auror's?"

"But of course Headmistress."

She gave him a look, the look you give an old friend who is jerking your chain when you couldn't have the laugh that you wanted to have. Her eyes sparked a bit and the corner of her mouth twitched. She swept from the room to gather some Aurors.

The third year Gryffindors and Slytherins missed the rest of their classes for the day. It took the Aurors quite some time to sort through the memories of all those present. The Slytherins were very resistant to giving up copies of their memories of the scene. Dumbledore's skill with mind magic coupled with his credentials from the Crown were enough to ensure that everyone left a copy of their memory of the fight for the Aurors.

His credentials from the Crown meant he got a few more memories than were strictly required for the task at hand. Miss Parkinson and Professor Snape were especially interesting.

Harry was among the last to be interviewed by the Aurors. Hermione was in another room talking to Tonks, Harry drew Kingsley. Both of the Aurors had both fought at Azkaban.

Kingsley took her through the class from start to finish. Harry was a good witness, she remembered and was careful to clearly state what was fact what as opposed to interpretation.

"So what do you think Mr. Shacklebolt? What was this about?"

Kingsley pondered a minute.

"Harry I would be lying if I didn't say there wasn't a lot of discrimination against people like you and Hermione. I just get the feeling there is more going on. Parkinson pulling in your aunts, I

don't understand that. I don't see any advantage to the Death Eaters moving the Headmistress aside. Maybe they just wanted to know how we won at Azkaban. None of the Death Eaters has seen one of those sabers before."

It was a thoughtful Harry that made her way to the kitchens. She didn't want to face the Great Hall tonight. She tickled the pear, and entered the kitchen to see Molly Weasley overseeing the last of the evening cleanup. Harry liked Mrs. Weasley quite a lot. They had a good chat as Harry made herself a something to eat then cleaned up after herself. She took two steaming mugs of hot chocolate complete with warming charms out of the kitchen and headed for the Gryffindor tower. Mione always loved hot chocolate in the evening.

Harry put the mug on Hermione's nightstand and went to get ready for bed. It had been a long hard day with a longer one tomorrow. Their new instructor would be expecting them super early.

"I swear he doesn't have a mother, never has. He popped full grown from the forehead of Satan."

Harry sputtered into her porridge. They had finished their first week of training under the new instructor. Ron was in full rant.

"Satan has an interest in us does he Ron?"

"Must have, you can judge by the results."

Ron had been in the infirmary with a broken arm on Wednesday, He had fallen badly after a very vigorous throw during hand to hand training.

"He is a very sad man. So many losses. I have never met anyone quite like him save the Headmaster and Mr. Moody."

"How do you mean sad Luna? He is full of sadness or he is so damaged that knowing him brings sadness?"

Luna nodded agreeably. Harry grinned at her. Luna was a living Zen koan. Neville stared at her blinking. He shook his head and turned back to his breakfast.

Between the runic pajamas and their newly intense physical training Harry had been sleeping very well indeed, no matter her discomfort with the schools reaction to her relationship with Hermione. Hermione was shocked at the virulence of the response. Harry was as well, she had grown up in San Francisco. They had withdrawn from one another and that made Harry very unhappy indeed. She glanced at her blood sister and caught her eye, as always a rush of warmth, connection.

"I think its a good day to go see the elves. Come with me Hermione?"

She nodded and smiled a bit, she was looking forward to the visit as much as Harry. The rest of their group clamored to go, Ron and Ginny, Neville, Luna and the twins. The posse headed out, wrapped in warm cloaks and scarfs, gloves and hats, the chill rains of autumn had arrived. They stopped at Hagrid's hut to invite him. He was happy to put aside his work and lead them into the Forest.

Fang zigged back and forth in front of them almost like a real hunting dog. Hagrid kept up a steady conversation with Neville about the flora they passed. Harry had to pull Nev along every so often. Hagrid would be busy for the next while with Neville pestering him to go into the Forest after the fall plants. Even in the mist and rain it was a place of beauty, the last brown leaves trickled to the forest floor, drips of water timed themselves to land perfectly on the exposed skin of necks for maximum chill. The forest smelled of fall, late fall, almost like it was fermenting as the newly fallen leaves changed into duff. It was the smell that went with hot cider and the late run of spawning trout.

The group entered the clearing of huge trees that Fang had found on the winter solstice almost a year ago. They paused to take in the scene.

In the center was a graceful structure, not extraordinarily large. It was a single room with a huge fire pit in the center and almost all windows. The floor was covered warm soft rugs, large soft pillows scattered everywhere, and low comfortable couches. The colors were muted and earthy, in contrast to the gleaming white exterior. The building was stark, the structure itself was the decoration, the graceful sweeps of beams and eaves made light and shadow the ornamentation. A path of flagged stones led to double doors. The

doors themselves consisting mostly of diamond panes of beveled glass.

There was a powerful magical presence in the glen. Despite the openness of the building and the glen none of them doubted that the place was powerfully warded and carefully watched. They walked down the path and Hagrid knocked on the door. Quite quickly a figure moved from the shadows of the room towards them.

It was Dobby, smiling in welcome. He threw the doors open with a glad shout and was among them hugging them all. Laughing and chattering the group moved inside. Dobby led them through the room to another doorway and down a long tunnel to a grand sweep of stairs ending in a huge chamber carved from the native rock. Tunnels radiated off of this central point in all directions.

Elves were everywhere, many popping in with goods and the results of their hunts, the elves were stocking their larders for a long winter and they hadn't much time. Stag, boar, sheep, sides of beef were carried past, basket after basket of apples and berries, birds of all types, sacks of grain, salt, everything imaginable.

Hagrid looked massively uncomfortable at the amount of game he saw passing into the larders.

"Dobby you know to leave enough so there is some for the next year eh?"

"Hagrid you forget we can pop. Our hunters are hunting many places other than the Forbidden Forest. Come and see what we have done!"

They got the grand tour, what had been accomplished in a few weeks was astonishing. Most of the elves had yet to make themselves private dwelling spaces in the caves they were excavating, they had to concentrate on becoming self sufficient before they could turn their attention to comfort. As they were touring the kitchens, much to Ron's delight, word came of trouble. A party out gathering food had run afoul of a hunting party of acromantulas and was about to be overwhelmed.

The girls each took one of Dobbys arms as he called for the guard to follow them. With a pop they were in the woods and running to

follow Dobby. The hissing of the spiders was before them, the desperate cries of the elves and the clash of weapons rang through the forest. The girls called for their armor and staves. They charged into the back of the mass of spiders who had just managed to encircle the elves stopping their retreat. Dobby gave a shout and lit his saber. The girls stood to either side of him and a bit behind. Even they wouldn't presume to stand before an elven lord in full battle rage. The girls ground thrust their staffs to the earth and cast massive reductos before them, a path to the elven gatherers was blown clear. The three fighters charged to the trapped elves taking up positions around them, hoping to be able to provide cover until their guard could catch up to them. The girls had time for a couple more reductos before the spiders closed the range and it was sabers against pincers dripping venom. Harry's blade danced and flashed piling her enemies before her. She could hear skittering in the distance and closing fast.

"DOBBY GET THEM OUT! MORE ARE COMING! WE CAN'T HOLD!"

Her answer was a roar of rage, but the gatherers started to pop away, the magic of their Lord and the girls sufficient to overcome the ward of the spiders. It was Hermione who grabbed the other two by their collars and apparated them to the elven glen. Evidently the spiders were not far away, they could hear the skittering and hissing of disappointment. They could hear it headed their way.

Hagrid charged out of the building and ran headlong at the oncoming spiders. He was yelling at them to stop. Dobby had popped to the main cavern and called to arms. His legion gathered as quickly as they could be recalled and were arming but it would take time. The non combatants retreated into the tunnels.

Hermione was cursing a blue streak. Harry was changing wands to sabers as fast as she could get them from their friends.

"Heads and legs, keep moving back."

They turned to see Hagrid standing at the edge of the glade waving his arms and yelling for the spiders to stop. They swarmed over him, pouring into the glade like a coal slurry, thick and gravid with purpose. Hagrid was down.

Harry popped to him, the insects swarming over her, smashing her to the ground. She got a hand on Hagrid and popped them to the cavern. Dobby called for a healer and the two of them charged up the stairs and into the elegant interior of the entrance building.

"FALL BACK INTO THE TUNNEL! WE CAN'T HOLD HERE!"

Their little knot of fighters scurried into the tunnel entrance between the glowing blades of Harry and Dobby.

The glass of the beautiful windows imploded under the impact of hundreds of spiders. Dobby, Hermione and Harry banished the shards of glass into the massed ranks of their enemies.

It was Dobby who gave the challenge.

"This way is closed to you. Do not attempt it. We will fill the passage with your dead. You will find nothing here."

The spiders paused. Just at the top of the glen they could see the heaving of a massive back, larger by far than any of the others, forcing its way forward. Aragog, King Acromantula was coming. If he were to try to enter the tunnel, he would have filled it completely. His voice was of age and ancient venom.

"True elves. I had never thought to feast on true elves. If I spend all my children for one of yours I will call it a bargain. Century beyond century it has been since our kinds have fought elf lord. There was never peace between us, never shall there be."

"There could be if you would have it so."

"Ah, but I will not. Destroy them my children."

Dobby popped. He was astride Aragog. His blade hissed cleaving the massive head from the body. The death spasms of Aragog tossed Dobby among the mass of spiders. Luna screamed and disappeared. Harry caught a glimpse of her blade near where Dobby had fallen.

"BLOODY FUCK!"

She popped to Luna hoping she didn't get cut in half. It was perfect, they were back to back and standing over Dobby. Harry put a foot on Dobby and apparated all three of them into the main cavern.

Luna grabbed her hand and they charged up the stairs again. They squirmed and wiggled to get to the front of the elves in the tunnel. In seconds they could see the flash of sabers and hear the hissing of the spiders. Their clacking hissing speech taunting the defenders, promising vengeance and pain. The fighters circled to the front and swung until they were worn, then eased back a step allowing the one behind them clearance to fight. The first frantic seconds were over. The tunnel was very nearly blocked with the corpses of spiders. The ones behind had to remove dead bodies to get at the defenders.

Limpy stood by Hermione's shoulder, yelling over the hissing of blade and enemy.

"WE ARE READY. OUR LEGION WILL POP OUTSIDE AND HIT THEM FROM BEHIND. HOLD THIS TUNNEL IF YOU CAN. COLLAPSE IT IF YOU MUST."

Hermione pulled her into a hug and nodded. Step by step the defenders retreated buying their retreat with dozens of corpses. Venom covered the tunnel. The girls were unaffected as they had their armor. The others were in warm clothes that had become very warm indeed. They were scratched and bleeding, all of them. The venom was making them slower and weaker. The girls ordered them to the rear. When they were ignored they ordered the elves behind them to take them to the rear. There were several pops and the sound of distant offended bellowing. Ron hated missing a fight and hated spiders.

Now it was two sabers, and no time, they must be perfect. Elven warriors stood just to the rear with quick swords and bows. Step by step they were beaten back. For anyone else it would have been impossible, the quarters were too close, they would have interfered with one another. The girls had fought this fight in countless practice sessions. They danced their deadly dance and moved back stubborn inches at a time.

Outside the elven legion formed. One thousand strong they formed into ten centuries, formed squares and planted their standards. They ringed the glen, from the edge of the trees to midway to the

destroyed building, Their short bows sang and arrows sleeted into the packed ranks of insects. Hissing and clacking those that lived turned to face this new threat.

The solid press of spiders into the tunnel slackened. Their enemy turned to easier prey. Legs churning over their fallen and mandibles clicking they charged. They surged around the fallen body of Aragog each headed to the elf nearest to them. They were a hungry disorganized mob. Had they concentrated on one of the centuries they would have overwhelmed it. The elves had drilled their tactic. Their front folded into the sides creating a cup shape, the edges of the cups widened to link the centuries.

It was a terrible battle. The spiders so outweighed the elves, were so large compared to their enemies that even with swords the elves were well within the range of the spiders mandibles. Elven magic blew apart spider after spider, blades flashed at the leading edges of the battle anchored by the explosive hexes of the elves in the rear. Those elves at the forefront took heavy losses.

In the end only a few spiders escaped that glen.

In the cavern the wounded were cared for. Poppy moved among the injured, she had brought some volunteers from St. Mungos. The Flamels were brewing anti venom and other potions in a furious huddle of activity. Hagrid's life hung by a thread. Dobby had been badly bitten and might lose an arm. Luna had undoubtedly saved him in the quarter second she had defended him. She had taken a few bites and was loopy with potions, humming softly to herself on a cot. The girls were slumped in exhaustion against a wall, legs outstretched, shoulders touching. Each cradled a cup of hot chocolate, nature's most perfect cure.

The elves had lost over a century of warriors. Mourning songs echoed in the vast space as names were sung into their history.

Harry struggled with so much death, looking for the point where it could have gone differently. They had been at the exit of the tunnel when the battle ended, she and her Mione. Without the legion attacking from the outside the spiders would have pushed them into the cavern and slaughtered them all in a melee fight among the elven children and old ones. The few dozen that had broken through

had caused more than their share of death before being brought down.

Nations are born in blood, just as babies are.

"Allright Mione?"

"No. You?"

"No. We have to stop meeting this way."

She couldn't help it, she snorted her nose full of hot chocolate.

"I'd hit you if I could raise my arm."

Harry grunted, slid down the wall a bit, and put her head in Mione's lap. Hot chocolate later, Mione now. She closed her eyes. Hermione ran her hand through the messy raven hair, matted and tangled. Hermione felt the warmth she always felt when she touched Harry. For now she was too tired and battle sick to fret over it. It just was. She sipped her drink again and put it aside. Slowly her hand stilled on her Harry and they slept.

The worst of the medical needs were seen to. Work crews were rendering the bodies of their enemies for venom and silk. A century marched to the vast web that had been home of the colony and burned it to ash, taking whatever of value they found. They were able to free a yearling unicorn from a cocoon.

The dog and the wolf found the girls asleep against the wall a few hours later. They were beautiful, Harry sprawled out, head in Hermione's lap, Hermione's hand resting gently on Harry's forehead, her own head on her shoulder, back to the rough stone of the cavern.

Sirius picked up Harry, Remus got Hermione. The girls stirred but didn't wake. Poppy had dosed all the hot chocolate pretty strongly. They apparated to the edge of Hogwarts wards and started towards the castle. The others had already returned. The men talked quietly.

"How do they always end up waist deep in blood Paddy? It worries me. They have been in more desperate fights than anyone but Moody and Dumbledore, and they are closing in fast."

"Moony old man if I could get grab Fate I would certainly be kicking that arse. Bloody damn prophecy, bloody damn Voldemort, bloody double damn DEMENTORS and now SPIDERS! It's enough to drive a man to drink. Did you hear about Snivelus this week?"

"Yes, I don't understand that one at all. It seems they have chosen one another, at least for the present. I don't know Paddy, I know they love one another, but it seems so, well, circular if you know what I mean. Besides they are entirely too young to be in love."

Sirius shifted his girl higher as they started up the steps to the Entrance Hall.

"Moons old man, as you contradicted yourself, they do love one another. I'm glad it's down to them to figure out how they love one another. Remember being thirteen? Wouldn't wish it on anyone."

He looked down at his Harry, his harsh face softening.

"So young Moony. I do love them."

The devil glinted in his eye again, situation returning to normal.

"I have 50 galleons they end up together."

Moony chuckled.

"I'll take that bet. You didn't specify together, pay up."

The wolf was still snickering and the dog sputtering when they left their charges comfortably tucked into the harsh beds of the infirmary and settled into chairs to watch over them and Hagrid. Poppy had been able to stabilize the half giant, and his iron constitution was healing him as fast as could be expected. No one looked forward to telling him that the spiders were gone.

Albus had missed the battle in the glen. He wasn't sorry to have missed the fight, he had been in too many desperate places to have any urge to have been in another. The girls had fought again. There blades seemed to be in use more often than not. He had hoped to derail Fate by crushing Riddles organization. He considered the work yet to be done to finish the dismantling. The thing with Snape

worried him, was it a random twitch of bigotry or the first move in some opening game?

He stumped into the small house he was sharing with Moody and put up his cloak. Alastor was in the kitchen finishing a stew. Albus joined him setting the table and making a salad. They sat in easy silence through the meal. Once they were done and the dishes cleared away, they talked about their days. Alastor had spent his day sitting in on the last of the Death Eater trials. He had done the final checks on the Obliviators of the Eaters.

"Damn glad that Lestrage woman is done. I checked her three times. Put me at ease Albus, checked her again. She was always a royal pain and hellish talented in a fight. That's one I don't want to ever see again."

Albus nodded in agreement. Bella was nearly as bad as her master.

"Where are they being kept Alastor?"

"Got one of the Lestrage manors set up for them. They are all mind wiped and have had their magic bound. Got some Catholic nuns taking care of them."

Both men held that thought as Albus poured a healthy three fingers of firewhiskey for them. They clinked glasses and threw the vile liquid back. Alastor was the first to start laughing. It was a long time before they stopped.

"That Q man is a pain in my ass Albus, if he tells me to pay attention one more time I'm going to curse him."

"Perhaps we should introduce him to the Unspeakables. Let them fight it out."

"Excellent. Now what about that filth Snape? He tried to kill one of the girls did he?"

"He threw everything but an Unforgivable at Hermione. Naturally Harry jumped in. Pomfrey had to rebuild his throat and most of his wand arm. Cut his wand in thirds. I don't understand it Alastor, can't see what he was attempting. Once he was down he tried to use

mind magic on them. Harry damn near blew his head off. Can you see any reason he would attack them like that?"

"Skills test? Draw the weapons out? Just plain hates people like them? Hoped the emotion would open their mental defenses?"

"The last seems the most logical, he hasn't been privy to the information he had before Nicolas and Perenelle entered society again. Minerva has never liked or trusted him. Still for whom did he hope to gather the information?"

Moody snorted.

"No one liked him Albus, not since he was fifteen and he lost Lily Evans. Stupid sod. As for who, what have you heard about Riddle?"

Alastor poured for them. They clinked glasses and sipped their last serving for the evening.

"Nothing since Azkaban. He was there, no doubt, but you knew that. Not a whisper since. Ask Her Majesty if we could be excused to tour the continent. We may gain word of him there. It would do no harm to hear what we might from those who didn't fight at Azkaban. Lucius hired some fighters, we might learn something from them. Last time Riddle hid in Albania. We should look there to see if he left anything in the area. Did you search the place Malfoy was found?"

"I will ask Her Majesty. We can search the place before we head to the continent. Is Black going to annul the Malfoy marriage? I don't like that hanging. That boy was on his way to being his father, if he gets his fathers money it could be trouble. We can assist him to see Narcissia, shes staying with some relative of Lucy's. The brat is at Beauxbatons isn't he?"

"I shall remind Sirius that he has some family business to deal with. I expect the Weasleys to be quite happy with the results. I think Arthur will end the feud if Draco and Narcissia swear to a cessation of hostilities. I will send a note to the delightful Madame Maxime, you are correct Draco is enrolled there. I shall be quite interested to see him again."

Albus took a quill up and dashed a short note to Sirius asking his intentions regarding the Malfoys. Fawkes snatched it from him and

flashed away. His girls were near Sirius, and it was a visit to the school, a place the phoenix loved.

The flare of Fawkes arriving woke the two watchers. Fawkes perched on Sirius' shoulder cooing and fussing with his hair. Since the Battle of Azkaban Fawkes seemed much fonder of Sirius. Lord Black read the note and huffed at the interfering old man. It was especially irksome as Albus was right, he had forgotten completely about the Malfoys.

Remus and Sirius worked over the correct wording for the annulment. Fawkes let them hammer at it, spending his time crooning to his girls. He launched across the room and gave a few tears to Hagrid, who loved everything, especially the interesting creatures of the world. Fawkes would stop by the site of the day's battle, the elves were in need. He was well pleased with the state of the world. Much of the looming dark had been dissipated. His girls should have some time now to grow undisturbed before the final struggle. Sirius gave the phoenix his reply and Fawkes flashed to Dobby, healing his wounds with tears. He moved from elf to elf doing all he could for them.

Albus was just sliding out of his bunny slippers, taking a bit of a light head to bed with him. Alastor was good company and the whiskey had been especially fine that evening. Fawkes flamed into the room and perched, humming softly. Albus took the note and set it aside, pulled the covers over his old bones, and let sleep take him to another day.

Harry sat on her bed at the end of another frustrating day. She was more than a bit tired of the attitude of her schoolmates and her trainer. The constant sniping was wearing. At least the group's physical combat instructor didn't seem to be prejudiced. He hated them all equally. They had yet to learn his name. He seemed to think that Sir was too familiar and seemed offended they spoke to him at all.

She burrowed through her trunk looking for a distraction, looking to be carried away from the present pain of Hermione distancing herself. Harry searched her trunk for Lily's notebook from Lily's time as an Unspeakable. For weeks she had meant to look at it, but the press of events had kept her from it. She found it and slipped under the covers to read. She was quickly lost. The work journal was

almost indecipherable to Harry. Lily had been working in very advanced areas of magical theory. There were personal notes interspersed with the research she had been conducting, Harry treasured those, quick notes to get some bit of shopping, or reminders of the Marauders coming for dinner. Lily had been researching possible counters to the unforgivable curses, shields or protections. Harry gleaned what she could, losing all sense of time as she studied the work. Lily had been close to an answer, must have solved the problem somehow, as Harry had survived Voldemort's killing curse. There was mention of a runic ritual of protection, but the details were sketchy at best, in a shorthand that Lily might have known but Harry certainly didn't. Several books were referenced without it ever being clear which books exactly. Harry set the notebook aside. She considered the total of her life.

She was reminded of black body theory. It was an astronomical theory stating that if the observable facts didn't fit known circumstances you should posit an unknown force sufficient to explain the phenomena. Snape's actions were so egregiously overdone that simple prejudice wasn't a sensible explanation, even granted the conservatism of magical society. The elves had been hunting for weeks and the day the girls visit the spiders mount a suicidal assault. The strain was even showing in their little circle. Millie had been acting a bit skittish the past few days. Harry sighed and rolled over.

One damn kiss and the world goes crazy. It didn't make sense. It must be coincidental to another fact they had yet to discover. Harry wondered what the shade of Voldemort was doing. If somehow Voldemort was finding a way to effect the world, that would make better sense. Snape would have easily kept the Dark Lord from possessing him, but could he have been influenced enough to cause his attack? Had the shade of the Dark Lord influenced Aragog to send his entire brood against the elves? But it was so stupid if Riddle had. He had lost two major pieces on a board that was nearly clear for no apparent gain, only an idiot would do that.

Harry contemplated the distinct possibility that the Dark Lord was completely insane. She thought about their efforts to hinder him and felt a glow of pride. They had dismantled his power structure. But what of his base? Did blood purity still stir people to a combat fervor? Harry resolved to ask in History of Magic the next day.

Professor Perenelle would no doubt have an interesting perspective as always.

Harry raised her hand as soon as she sat down in History. Hermione goggled at her. Role reversal par excellence.

"Yes Miss Pomfrey?"

"Professor recently the forces who most militantly back blood purity have suffered rather catastrophic losses. Do you think that Voldemort or another Dark Lord presumptive will be able to use those beliefs to again threaten our society?"

"A most interesting question my dear. Why do you ask it in History of Magic?"

"Because you are the instructor Professor. You have born personal witness to how many Dark Lords?"

"Something like fifteen my dear."

"Has the basis for their power always been blood purity? The superiority of pure blooded wizards over those more recently become magical?"

"No cheri, always they call others to their banner claiming to offer their followers more than they have. From whom this more is to be taken often changes from Dark Lord to Dark Lord and even withing the time of a Dark Lord. Consider our latest. Voldemort claimed to champion those of pure wizard ancestry. He promised to lead the pureblood wizards to a victory where wizards of pure blood ruled over all others, magical and mundane. History shows us that he was quite willing to kill pure blood wizards. History shows us that he was quite willing to kill anyone or anything that displeased him. The reports of his followers are illuminating. Verified witness reports repeatedly mention his followers being routinely subjected to the Cruciatis, of being expected to kiss his feet, of being at his whim, of giving up their fortunes and homes to him, of being killed by him. None mention any advantage they gained from association with him in either treasure or status. Occasionally his servants were allowed to terrorize muggles or other magicals, even torture and kill them. This was their reward. He is not singular in this. It is true of every Dark Lord. That is the nature of the Dark.

They lost very much more than they ever gained by association with him. Any of his followers could have taken their wand and tortured and killed to their hearts content in muggle areas. He gave them what they already had the means to get themselves. Effectively he gave them nothing in return for everything.

I should like you all to think deeply on this. To aid you in your thoughts I will expect three feet of parchment applying the theories of Darwin to the evolution of magical beings. I will not be impressed should you fail to address the birth rate of magical as opposed to mundane. This is a complex subject, you will have to become familiar with the esteemed Dr. Darwin's theory so I will expect your essay's in three weeks time. You may work in groups if you like. There will be no more than four to a group. Good day children."

Harry could feel her popularity take another severe kick in the head. She packed up her books and hefted the bag to her shoulder, turning towards the door and bumping into Hermione. Harry bounced back and would have fallen if Mione hadn't grabbed her arm. Mione had the crazed look of rabid scholarship about her, her hair was electric and close to the voltage of a Van de Graaff generator. Harry didn't need to be a seer to know that she had some long nights coming in the library.

Mione started frog marching Harry towards the library chattering a mile a minute. Harry listened with half an ear and a warming heart. Her Mione was touching her again.

"This will be so interesting Harry! The Darwinian effect of Dark Lords! Oh I am so glad that Binns retired!"

"There is another good bit we need to get after Mione. I'll show you tonight."

It was cruel, but Harry felt justified. She dangled the carrot of another intellectual puzzle in front of Hermione for the rest of the day. Finally Harry took mercy and showed Hermione Lily's notebook just before they would have normally gone to bed. Harry slid under her covers while Hermione read away, repeating pages and muttering. She was giving her lower lip a furious biting, a sure sign she was puzzled. Harry threw a cover over her and closed the curtains so the other girls could sleep. Lavender and Pavarti were usually quick to

fall asleep and sound sleepers. Tonight they seemed to go quiet almost instantly. Harry imagined their ears were very carefully tuned indeed.

Harry scooted closer to Hermione and the two began to whisper about the passages they were reading. They made notes of their questions and their guesses concerning reference works Lily mentioned. They had charms the next day. They would make sure Professor Flitwick had a chance to see the notebook. He was undoubtedly the best qualified to work out what Lily had been doing other than Dumbledore. Both girls wanted to understand Lily's work. Harry for personal reasons. She wanted to help finish whatever her mother had started as well as bring about the protections hinted at in the work. Hermione wanted to finish it for the good it would do and the challenge of it. They worked another hour and finally Harry gently, insistently pulled the notebook away from Hermione. Mione seemed to come out of a trance as Harry set the notebook aside, gave her a quick peck on the lips and a gentle shove towards her own bed.

"Go to sleep Mione, we can hit him as soon as we get to class."

Hermione looked long and carefully at Harry.

"You think your pretty sneaky don't you Pomfrey."

Harry nodded fighting a grin. Mione lifted a soft hand to her cheek, stroked softly once, twice.

"I do love you Harry. Wait for me?"

"Always."

They were both blushing as Hermione disappeared through Harry's curtain and scampered over the icy floor to her bed. They both slept much better than they had of late.

Chapter 17

Disclaimer: JKR and some corporations own Harry Potter, I do not

Sirius sat at his desk glaring at the note he would be sending in the morning. It was time to deal with his cousin and her idiot child. According to the people he had hired to find them, they were tucked into the home of a Malfoy in the south of France. He imagined their welcome was wearing thin indeed. Narcissa had never been easy to have around.

He sighed and leaned back in the chair. Again he considered his options. He could leave things as they were, the Malfoy fortune in limbo, and a blood feud in place between the Weasleys and Narcissa and Draco. Provided the French Malfoys didn't pile on their wasn't much that the two remaining Malfoys could do in the near term. That was under the assumption that the French Malfoy's were less greedy and evil than their English relatives. Sirius had no desire to see the Weasley clan dragged into a war of attrition. They hadn't any resources other than their wands and the skill with which they used them. Draco was almost certain to try something as he got older. It was the very definition of an unstable situation.

If he annulled the marriage between Lucius and Narcissa he was automatically head of house for her, she became a Black again. Of course he could disown her, and he would, if she failed to swear an unbreakable vow repudiating Voldemort. She would swear another to do no harm to the Weasley clan. Then she would be welcome as a Black; Sirius, Bellatrix, Andromeda and Nymphadora. He hadn't disowned Bella. She was effectively a child now and starting over. When she reached the age of reason he would reevaluate her.

He had a vicious urge to throw things. All his life he had run from membership in the pureblood aristocracy of the magical world. He had though himself well away from it, a free agent. Yet here he was sitting in his study trapped in dynastic manipulation just like any random pureblood. The Marauder in him was screaming for release.

Narcissa had been a stuck up bit of sputum that he really didn't want in his life. If they accepted his protection he would stand as father to Draco. It would be up to Sirius to try to turn the boy around. Sirius was a very unhappy puppy. Harry was as safe as she could be, his duties as godfather were easy, he tried to provide her with some joy

and got so much more back in the doing. Providing guidance for Draco was going to be easy, actually changing him would be perhaps impossible.

Sirius would rather fight Voldemort, at least only he would pay for his mistakes. He rubbed his forehead and stared at the letter again.

Remus rapped on the door of the study.

"Come on in Moony."

Remus settled into a chair next to the desk with a bottle and two glasses. He drew the cork and poured two full measures of a very fine claret.

They were silent for a minute allowing the wine to bloom and ease the tensions of the day from them.

"I know what I should do Moony, I just don't think that I am able to deal with them"

"Paddy, the status quo leaves loose ends, dangerous ones."

"I know, but they WILL resent being stripped of their fortune. The boy will hate me instantly. I can't imagine him as anything other than Lucy's son, a total bigoted berk."

"I don't envy you the duty. How about we do it together? If you appoint me his guardian until his majority, we can at least split the load."

"No Mooney, this one is mine. I have to see them Moony. I don't want to."

Sirius sighed and picked up his quill again. He signed the short note asking for permission to visit the home of Jorge Malfoy on a matter concerning Narcissa Malfoy and her son. He grumbled continuously while fixing the note to the owl and sending it on it's way.

Remus clapped him on the back and they talked of other matters, the village, the girls, and their own plans for the near future. Potter Construction had sent a second shipment of material to the elves and was helping in the process of rebuilding. Sirius had recently

become involved in the ongoing growth of the lycan village. With the Dementors gone he felt at loose ends and needed something to occupy him. Remus appreciated his help, but knew his friend was something less than fully involved.

They passed the next few days easily, working in the village and helping with the location and purchase of raw material in preparation for the coming building season.

Sirius received a reply from Jorge Malfoy that he would be welcome to visit the next day. Hurriedly packing enough for an overnight stay, Sirius flooed to the Ministry and took an international floo to France. He cleared customs and headed to the town of Orange. It was nearly midnight when a travel worn Sirius checked into a small inn that Jorge had suggested. He slept with his wand in one hand and a portkey in the other behind every ward he could think of casting. He was, after all, dealing with the honor of the Malfoys.

An ill tempered mutt had a light meal and apparated to the ward boundary of the Malfoy house. Quite soon he saw an average looking man making his way down the drive. He seemed formal and severe, but not haughty or snobbish. He was well dressed and softly spoken.

"I welcome you to my home and offer you my protection while you are here." It was an old form, he had pledged his honor to protect Sirius. Sirius bowed and shook his hand.

"I accept your protection with gratitude. A pleasure to meet you sir. I am Sirius Black, I assume you are Jorge Malfoy?"

His host nodded, flashing a quick smile.

"Yes, forgive me, I should have introduced myself. Please come with me. I have provided a small meal for you and Mrs. Malfoy. Her son will absent for the meeting initially. I thought it better that the two of you conduct any business you might have without him. He can be impetuous. I must say that Mrs. Malfoy and Draco are under my protection. I assume you mean them no harm?"

"No harm at all sir. I hope to help them if they will allow it. You are welcome to attend our meeting if Mrs. Malfoy agrees."

Jorge nodded and moved quickly into the handsome house before them. The men walking into a morning room full of sun and a view of some lovely gardens. Narcissa was seated in a comfortable chair looking out at the garden. She rose and turned to met them at the sound of their voices. Sirius hadn't seen her since his Hogwarts days. She was still lovely, she had aged well, slim and elegant. She looked her usual imperious self. Even as a child she had a presence, an expectation that others were there for her. Sirius paused, clicked his heels and inclined his head.

"Narcissa, it has been a long time."

She nodded and said nothing. Jorge cleared his throat and suggested they seat themselves. As they sat Jorge rang a little bell. Nothing was said for a minute as a servant entered with a trolley containing fruit, pastry and tea. The servant quickly set the things out and left the room.

"Jorge has offered to stay for our talk if you wish Narcissa."

"I am well able to care for myself Jorge, however you are welcome."

She had lost none of her abilities. She was a guest in his house, dependent on his hospitality for her comfort and protection, and still she made it seem as if she was the one in control. Jorge glanced at her, a small smile flickered and was gone.

"I am annulling your marriage to Lucius. You will, of course, become Miss Narcissa Black. Draco will have no last name. The Weasley's will end their blood feud with you and Draco provided you both swear an Unbreakable Vow to never cause their clan harm. Are either of you marked?"

Narcissa drew her wand.

"On my life and magic I swear I have not been given the Dark Mark. So mote it be."

She quickly followed the flash of the vow with levitation of a teapot. She was not Marked. She seemed amused at his surprise.

"I do not think Draco has been marked. You shall have to ask. So I will no longer be Narcissa Malfoy. Will you disown me cousin?"

"Only if you fail to give renounce Voldemort and swear the oath the Weasley's require. Narcissa. I will not have a supporter of Voldemort in my family. Ever. I have had the pleasure of accepting Andromeda back into our family. What will you do?"

"Have a care, Bella is dangerous."

"You are behind the times. Bella is currently learning to talk again in the care of the good Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence."

"She is in a nunnery? How droll."

"He promised rich rewards and his favor. He only tortured and killed. His Death Eaters were often the victims of his rage, even Lucius. It must be the Mark, I can think of no other explanation that proud men would suffer him. He gave nothing, cared nothing, took everything. Lucius was not a maniac when I first met him. Over the years Lucius became something so vile that the sight of him turned my stomach. I would have left him, but I was afraid and afraid for Draco. I did my best to protect Draco. I still fear for my son, I fear what he has so nearly become. You must tell me your plans for him before I give any further oaths."

"No. I will not. You will swear the oaths I require if you would have a name. Narcissa do you know why the Weasleys declared this feud?"

She shifted uncomfortably, on the defensive. She was studying the garden again.

"Lucius plotted to have their youngest child, the first girl in seven generations, possessed by a shade of Voldemort. She was weeks under the care of specialists at St, Mungo's. What would you have done had that been Draco?"

"Sirius that was precisely my husbands plan for Draco. Draco was to be a servant of the Dark Lord, subject to his whim. What are your plans for my son?"

"I will do him no harm provided he gives the same oaths I require of you. I will attempt to guide him to be a useful man. You will trust me or you will not. Decide."

Sirius turned to a table pulled a parchment from his valise and signed a document. He drew a small knife, nicked himself and dropped a bit of blood on the parchment. There was a flash of magic as the annulment was sealed.

"Jorge will you witness this annulment of the marriage of Lucius Malfoy and Narcissa Black?"

Jorge signed and gave his drop of blood.

"I accord you the protection of my house for the duration of this meeting Miss Black."

Sirius tried to control his sweat glands. Narcissa was in a great deal of emotional turmoil, his canine heightened senses could tell she was deeply disturbed. He held himself ready, balanced to move quickly.

She heaved a gust of a sigh.

"On my life and magic I swear to never serve Lord Voldemort. I further swear on my life and magic to cause no harm to the Weasley clan. So mote it be."

There was the white flash of light that accompanied the unbreakable vows.

"May I sign as well?"

Sirius handed her the knife and the quill. She was neat and quick. She tapped the document with her wand, producing copies for herself, Sirius, and Jorge. Sirius tapped the original and it disappeared to be recorded at Gringotts and the Ministry.

"Can you call Draco to us Narcissa?"

She nodded and left the room. Sirius turned to Jorge Malfoy.

"I mean no disrespect to you or your line. Lucius was an evil man. I do this in the hope of helping both Narcissa and Draco. I would be your friend if you would allow it. You have been extraordinarily patient and kind today."

Sirius offered his hand. He found himself most warmly embraced in the French fashion.

"Damn good thing Moony isn't here."

"She is not easy to know, that one, but I have come to think that there is worth in her. Her son may be ruined, it is very late in his life to change his path. It will take an extraordinary effort on his part to change."

"Do you think he will take the vows?"

Jorge gave a very French shrug.

Narcissa entered the room and stood to the side. Draco entered a beat after her, making his own entrance. He looked as haughty and privileged as any pureblood git ever did. Sirius instantly disliked him. He was everything that Sirius hoped he had rejected in his own upbringing.

Sirius clicked his heels and inclined his head a bit.

"Good morning Draco. I have this morning annulled the marriage between your mother and father. This leaves you with no name. As Head of House Black I will accept you into the Black family on three conditions. You give an unbreakable vow that you do not carry the Dark Mark. You give an unbreakable vow to never support Voldemort. You give an unbreakable vow to never harm the Weasley clan. Should you agree your mother will retain primary responsibility for your upbringing. I would be acting in an oversight capacity as your Head of House and will provide adequate funds for both your living expenses and your education. Are you willing to do this?"

Draco was struggling to remain impassive, and failing. He trembled slightly, flushed, fury in his eyes.

"Why should I hold the Weasley clan harmless? I lose my inheritance to their feud. I lost my father because of them."

"Will you give me your oath concerning the Dark Mark? I need to be sure that what I say is not said to a Death Eater."

Jorge spoke up.

"Draco your mother has given those same vows. You are under my protection for the duration of this meeting. At this meetings end you will go your way in the world. That way may be with Mr. Black and Miss Black. I can imagine that this is a very difficult decision for you. Please take a moment and calm yourself. Consider carefully what you choose here, your choice will not be undone."

Draco paled. His expectations of himself seemed to hold him together. He moved to the table with the tea things and poured himself a cup. A true Englishman, the tea seemed to calm him, some of the tension eased from his shoulders. The adults waited quietly for him. He set the cup down and turned from his contemplation of the sun on the flowers of the garden. Carefully, he drew his wand. He was thirteen and making a decision that would never be undone.

"I swear on my life and my magic that I am not a Death Eater. I have not taken the Dark Mark. So mote it be."

He levitated his tea cup back to his left hand and took another sip. One elegant eyebrow raised. Something in Narcissa's bearing gave the impression she was proud of him. Sirius nodded, forced to respect the child's poise.

"Voldemort led a raid to free the Death Eaters of Azkaban. That raid failed. Some of the Weasleys fought in the storming of Azkaban, your father did not. Of the Dark forces only Voldemort engaged us. The body he possessed was killed there. Lucius and the mercenaries he had hired for Voldemort returned to their base. Your father died at that base."

"Still the Weasley blood traitors declared a feud against us. I will avenge my father."

"Your acting like a fool. Do you think it incidental that the Dark forces turned on one another?"

Sirius shook his head like he was trying to clear water from his ears. His voice was a crack of fury now.

"Boy your father was killed by a mercenary. You were aware that Lucius had planned to purge Hogwarts of muggleborns and halfbloods. Did you know how he would do it? Did you know he had offered Voldemort Ginevra Weasley?"

Draco had thought long and hard about how he had been wronged. Beauxbatons had not been easy for him. He was a scholarship student, something he had never thought he would be. Beaubatons was very different from Hogwarts. He was at sea, cut off from his network of allies and from his fortune, he had spent the school year alone. Voldemort didn't have the hold on the public imagination in France he had in Britannia. The matter of blood purity was of little interest to the French, they had undergone a Revolution that left a bad taste in their mouths for anything smacking of an aristocracy.

On his own merits Draco was a reasonably competent wizard. He wasn't amazingly strong or especially talented, and certainly not as motivated to study as Granger. At first he had suffered through some rather terse discussions with his mother and Jorge concerning his grades and his future should he lose his scholarship. He made himself study more often. It helped him to feel less lonely. While not the top student he was solidly above average with especially good grades in potions.

It hadn't taken him long to learn to keep his opinions of blood purity to himself. Despite reigning in his sense of entitlement he still felt that he was the best and deserved the best.

Sirius looked at Narcissa.

"Miss Black, your son seems to be reluctant to swear the oaths required by me. Should he refuse, he will have no name, nor will I provide familial support. Please advise him as to his best course. I will return tomorrow for his answer."

Sirius left the room, Jorge at his side. They made plans to dine in the village. There was a rather good inn.

Narcissa studied her son. He sat stiffly clenching the arms of his chair, knuckles white, a vacant stare in his eyes.

"Draco your father caused the youngest Weasley to become possessed by the Dark Lord. Were you aware of your fathers plot?"

"I .. I knew he planned something for them. He wanted to discredit Weasley's Muggle Protection Act. He didn't tell me the details, only that I must stay out of it."

"Then you understand he gave a little pureblood girl to the Dark Lord."

Draco gulped and nodded.

"I am grateful to Weasley for his bill, I imagine that bill is the only reason Lucius went after the Weasley girl instead of you. Had the Weasley's done such a thing to you, I would kill them all. Would you not have sought revenge had they done such a thing to me?"

Draco nodded again, feeling the walls of logic crushing his little fortress of spite.

Narcissa moved to a couch and motioned Draco to sit beside her.

"You are Slytherin. Let us turn our ambitions to rebuilding our fortune. Our revenge should be aimed at the Dark Lord. Remember that the enemy of our enemy is our friend. Who do you imagine will inherit the House of Black? The best claim is yours or Nymphadora's. If you gain the approval of Sirius, you may gain his House. The Malfoy fortune is gone, the Black fortune is not."

She leaned closer to him and pulled his head into her shoulder. He was tense for a long moment, then gradually relaxed into her caress.

"I am proud of my heritage as a witch from a long line of magical ancestors. I no longer think that the Dark Lord will grant us special rights because of our ancestry, or because of any loyalty to him. He will return and he may well win the coming struggle. Have no illusion that his victory will benefit anyone other than him. Give your oath in the morning Draco. It will help in our efforts to restore our standing in the magical world. You need the protection of the Black name."

Draco pulled away from her, turned to the sun on the garden. He rose and made his way to the doors that opened on the garden.

"I will think about this. Thank you for your comfort Mother."

He closed the door softly behind him and moved off among the flowers, head bent, trailing a hand over the blossoms. Narcissa began to pray for him.

Draco didn't sleep that night. All night he circled over the bitter facts and the plain truths laid out before him. It was a bleary eyed young man who was called to the garden room to give his decision to Sirius.

Jorge, Narcissa, and Sirius were seated at a small table, pastry and tea before them. Sirius stood as he entered the room and gestured Draco to a chair. The boy sat and fixed a cup of tea for himself.

They were quiet, each watching the sun and the flowers. Finally Draco gusted out a sigh and stood.

He drew his wand and made his vow.

"I, Draco, do swear on my life and magic that I will never support the Dark Lord and that I will never knowingly cause harm to Clan Weasley so long as they cause no harm to me."

His vow was sealed in the usual flash of white light.

Sirius stared at him a moment then barked a laugh,

"I had forgotten the twins. You will measure your response to the provocation."

Sirius quickly gave the oath that accepted Draco into the House of Black. He stood now in Paterfamilias to Draco, literally as a father to him, giving him a last name. The boy was now Draco Black.

"I must head to Gringotts today, lots to do. I will be setting aside the old Black house in London for your use. I have inspected it, it is in terrible shape, I have a crew removing any dark objects now, and a remodeling crew ready to go. The house should be at least somewhat inhabitable by the end of the week. Draco please decide if you would like to finish your education at Beaubatons or move back to Hogwarts for your next year. I will need your answer as quickly as you can get it to me. This will be very challenging for us all. I intend to see us succeed. Let me know your arrival time and I will see that you have accommodations while the work goes forward

on your new house. I assume you would like to pick the new furnishings Narcissa?"

Sirius bowed to Narcissa and Jorge and shook Draco's hand. He apparated to coast and cleared customs. The next portkey to the Ministry left in two minutes, he just caught it and went in search of Arthur.

Sirius and Arthur stood in the Hall of Records before the ledger that tracked the status of pureblood families. The feud sworn between Clan Weasley and Lucius Malfoy, his wife and their son showed Lucius dead and the wife and son as having surrendered. Arthur took out his wand and declared the feud to be at an end. They watched as the Record updated to closed status. The two men made their way to Gringotts.

Arthur ordered Gringotts to produce a complete inventory of the contents of his new vaults. He would have Bill look the vaults over to see what should be destroyed. Sirius asked if he might have the dark objects from Grimmauld place brought to the bank for Bill's review as well. Arthur, as always, was agreeable. Arthur quite quickly set aside a nice heap of galleons for all his relatives that had come to help them take the Manor. He set aside a tidy little bit for each of his children to use as they saw fit. He got a key to the main vault for Molly and himself.

"Sirius I don't want to ever see Malfoy Manor again. I hate the place. What do you suggest?"

"It seems like a very large dark object doesn't it Arthur? You might be able to perform cleansing rituals. Ask Albus, he at least might know where we could look. If it can be cleansed you could sell it for a tidy bit. Do you intend to do some remodeling at the Burrow? At the very least Arthur put up the very best wards you can. You are very wealthy now and that makes you a target. Are there other properties than the manor? You might want to look at your investments as well. I understand that Lucius gained a good bit of his money in the muggle drug trade."

Sirius had to jostle Arthur a bit to recall his attention from a daydream of a large clean space filled with the very best of muggle plugs and batteries.

"Oh yes, I won't have any of that going on. Master Goblin prepare me a list of current investments and their return as well as a short bit of background information on their purpose. Tomorrow will be fine, thank you. I should like to withdraw some galleons. I am taking Molly to dinner tonight." He turned to Sirius with a wide and wild grin. "She quite likes dining out. Can you suggest somewhere? She should have new robes as well eh? I shall have to floo her directly!" Sirius grinned at his burgeoning enthusiasm and made his way to Potter House.

Arthur arrived at the Burrow to suffer the tender mercies of Molly's care. Immediately he was engulfed in a massive hug.

"It's over then? The feud?"

Arthur nodded. Molly squealed and kissed him soundly.

"Thank God. No one got hurt. What about the boy and Narcissa?"

"Sirius had them give an unbreakable vow to never support Voldemort or cause our clan harm unless we break the truce first. Write to the children and let them know that they can't prank the Blacks. Their vows were recorded at the Ministry as surrender. Its over. We have a lot to decide. I want to take you to a fine dinner, lets go get you some nice robes Mollywobbles."

Molly blushed and grabbed his hand, dragging him back into the floo.

"Madame Malkins!"

Arthur and Molly sat and sipped a very fine brandy after a very fine meal. A meal that Molly hadn't made. The soft glow of candlelight brought out hints of the beauty she once was. She remained the center of his heart and the mother of his children. She was completely lovely in his eyes and more than a bit uneasy about something.

"What is it Mollywobbles?"

"It's the money dear. It's lovely to have these robes and to know we need not ever worry about providing for the children but.."

Her hand, work worn and a bit calloused, smoothed the very soft fabric of a very fashionable set of robes in a deep green, a color Arthur loved to see her in, it brought out her hair.

"It doesn't seem right does it?"

"No dear, it doesn't. You say a lot of the Malfoy money came from the muggle drug trade? Arthur that's such a terrible thing. He profited from them making themselves slaves. We should use that money for good!"

He captured her hand as it fretted at her new robe, tearing at it. Her hand didn't think she should have such a nice thing purchased with galleons made in such a way.

"Mollywobbles the children are gone, the house feels quite empty doesn't it? What would you say to making a home for children who don't have one, or don't have a proper one? Sometimes muggles react badly to having magical children, perhaps we could take them in and care for them? It would take a great deal of work, much of it would fall to you, do you think it is something you might care for? If you find you don't care for it after a while, we can find someone to run it and continue to fund it."

Molly looked at Arthur, her eyes glistening in the candlelight. After all these years he still amazed her with his goodness, his plain easy goodness. She blessed again the day she found him.

"Arthur, how do we start? When can we? We shall have to remodel!"

"I expect we will have to do considerably more than remodel my love. Could you live in a new house? We may need quite a few bedrooms, and several bathrooms I expect."

They sat for another hour their excitement increasing as they planned how best to use their new fortune.

The next morning while Molly cooked their breakfast Arthur flooded Remus.

"Good morning Remus. We have been awarded the Malfoy's money, and frankly we don't care to keep it for ourselves. We, that is Molly and I, have decided to look into creating a home for children in need

of one. We would like Potter Construction to build us the home we will need. Can you send us someone who can help us design the home?"

"Bit excited Arthur?"

Remus and Arthur both laughed. Arthur was more than a little giddy. Molly added batter and soon fluffy piles of pancakes were in front of the people at her table. She held the excitement bubbling in her down and prepared to do business. The group would find that she had a fine mind for money, it was a different order of magnitude from her careful shopping for value when every sickle counted, but the skill was the same. Arthur was a bit inclined to go for the best of everything without much thought.

They began to gather information to determine just how big the house should be. Arthur's contacts in the Ministry proved invaluable, quite quickly they had the name and location of a Ministry supported orphanage. The group left to assess the building and start a needs survey.

Molly was glad of the company of Remus and Arthur. The orphanage was deep in Knockturn Alley, and the denizens of the alley scented prey. The men kept their hands on their wands and their eyes sharp. The budding architect, Mark, was a recent graduate of a Muggle uni. He lived in the village among the rest of the werewolves but was not capable of defending himself magically. He was a muggle/were, an unusual combination.

The Dillwillinger Home for the Unwanted was a tattered battered building missing shingles and quite a lot of window glass. The last time it was painted may have been the only time, it looked to have been built in the late seventies. Swaybacken broken steps led up to a scarred heavy door. The building exuded despair and pain.

They knocked and waited. Quite quickly the door was opened a crack and a dark beady eye peeped out at them.

"What do you want then?" The voice was raspy from heavy drink, edged as a serrated knife.

Remus, always a gentleman, spoke for them.

"We would like to see your facility. We are considering beginning another orphanage should there be need of one. May we come in?"

The door swung open enough to let them sidle through it single file.

"Remus Lupin, pleased to meet you ma'am. My companions are Arthur and Molly Weasley, and Mark Mendez."

"Mrs. Smeek." She didn't seem pleased but shook hands around and herded them away to her office. Molly's expert eye caught the decades of grime in the corners, the scarred and worn wood floors, the dingy gray paint on the walls. There was little light other than through the grimy windows. Mrs. Smeek's office was small and cluttered, everything piled together so it all held itself up, her three legged desk wedged into a corner to keep it steady, a broken back chair against a wall. The building was silent. Molly could sense no magic about Mrs. Smeek. Evidently she was a squib.

Molly was the first speak.

"Where are the children Mrs. Smeek?"

"Working Mrs. Weasley, they will be back about six for their supper."

Molly hoped she was wrong about that sick feeling she had. She was going to learn things she would rather not know. Arthur spoke up.

"I took the liberty of obtaining the budget for your facility Mrs. Smeek. Do you find it insufficient for your needs? It seems there is quite a bit of work needed to bring the building to decent condition, yet there are generous contributions listed for that purpose."

Mrs Smeek eyed him coldly. She pulled open a drawer and took out a ledger, dropping it with a thump in front of Arthur. She didn't say a word. They could feel her rage, beating on them like the sun. The visitors put their heads together and compared the line items.

Arthur's ears turned red. Remus began to growl, he didn't seem aware of it. Molly felt sick, lost. She moved to Arthur and dragged his arm around her. He pinched the bridge of his nose.

"How long has this been going on?" There was real fury in Arthur's voice. He had only been this angry a few times in the years she had known him.

"I've been here since the Home opened, it has gradually become this way. You are not the first wide eyed champions of justice to come in that door. Every one of them that made a noise died. Sometimes it took a while to get to them. Things got better for a bit, then they died and we were right back where we are."

Molly's voice was soft, strained.

"How many children are there here?"

"Sixty three"

"Do any of them need immediate medical care? Is there enough food for them when they get home for dinner?"

"Four should be in hospital. No there isn't enough, there never is."

"Can you get the rest of them here now? Can you tell us where they are?"

"They will kill you if you interfere. I'd leave but who would take care of them? They told me they would kill me. It's done very cleverly. That ledger is mine, there is another set of books the Board keeps that shows all the Ministry funds coming in and all the donations, what it doesn't show are all the payments including what galleons the children make. It's gotten much worse since the house elves left. They used to leave the little ones here, now any that can walk are put to work."

"But can you tell us where they are? Can you get them here?"

"They go various places, depends on what the days work is. I can't get them here. There are the four upstairs that need hospital, they couldn't work today."

Molly was moving towards the stairs.

"You can't take them. There is a trace on them, if they leave here the men will come."

Molly nodded once sharply.

"Fine then, I am going to St. Mungo's, I will be back with a Healer in a few minutes. Arthur go see to getting food. Remus get us some men who will fight. One of you get Dumbledore."

For the first time Mrs. Smeeck felt hope. Dumbledore, if Dumbledore was involved perhaps they would live through this. Molly bustled from the room and out of the building. They heard the crack of her apparition. Remus moved a bit slower, but only slow enough to say he would contact Dumbledore. Mrs. Smeeck eyed Mark.

"You look like you could do with a spot of tea dearie, shall we go to the kitchen and have a cuppa?"

He nodded meekly, rose and followed her to the kitchen, grimy and outdated. They had just sipped their tea and were making their way to the sick children when Molly rushed through the front door clamoring for them with a sputtering mediwitch in tow.

There was a fluster of activity while Molly and Mrs. Smeeck tried to explain the children couldn't be moved, but finally they were treated for their immediate illness and a potion regime started to rebuild their long term health.

Remus returned with a large crew of men and women, many carrying blades as well as wands, hard eyed and dour handed. Sirius stood with them growling ever so often. He had learned entirely too much about children around him being abused recently. Soon Molly had them cleaning. To her mind if you weren't fighting you might as well be cleaning. Arthur returned with what seemed half of the comestibles available to the magical world. He began expanding and storing his purchases as the kitchen was cleaned.

In another hour a massive pot of stew was simmering, the lower floor was clean, the upper was nearing livability and Albus Dumbledore arrived.

It wasn't long before Alastor was present. Shortly after Dung showed up, sliding through the door with an ease that spoke of familiarity with breaking and entering.

The Black Phoenix met in a corner. It was evident that the Board of Governors was corrupt. Some of the names on it were now guests of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence being retrained as stalwart citizens, or at least something other than the homicidal sociopaths known as Death Eaters. Fudge and Umbridge were on the Board. Several prominent pureblood families, not all Dark leaning were on the Board as well.

Albus was once again glad he had the confidence of the Queen. The Black Phoenix was once again going wildly off the reservation. Remus gathered ten of his best fighters along with Sirius and followed Alastor and Dung who were investigating the current whereabouts of the members of the Board.

Dung, Remus, Alastor, Sirius and the lycan squad hunted for Board Members. They were not being fancy or subtle at all. They stormed any location that held their quarry, stunned them, and ported them to the same holding cells that the Death Eaters had occupied before the Queen had renewed her control of magical Britannia.

Albus wanted to be at the orphanage to catch any minders that came with the children. Mrs. Smeeke said the children ported into largest downstairs room, an assembly hall. Molly, Arthur, and the rest of the lycan fighters were disillusioned against the walls. The plan was to stun everyone who ported in. They could enervate the children a few at a time to hold down the confusion as well as be certain that no one slipped away that shouldn't.

The center of the room began to shimmer with the color of an incoming portkey. A second later the red of stunners washed over the huddled mass of children. Molly was crying, she had fought like a tigress trying to avoid this mass stunning no matter the operational sense it made. There was a second cascade of color, four large very angry men phased into being just as the stunners washed over them. Roger, a lycan squad leader, ported out with the four men.

Mrs. Smeeke seemed in much better spirits after those large comatose bodies were out of her assembly hall.

"They were angry about something, its good they are gone. They would hurt the children sometimes when they were upset like that."

Molly caught a glimpse of some bruises on her upper arms.

"It wasn't only the children they hurt was it dear?"

Mrs. Smeeke whirled and glared at her.

"Maybe you lot can do some good here. Maybe not. If you can't finish this I won't live through it. Can't say that idea bothers me much. Some things you don't want to know Weasley. You haven't had it as easy as some, I can tell, but there is hard and there is hard. Mind your business."

Molly held her tears to herself.

A team began moving the children to another room and enervating them. Molly was helping move the children alongside Arthur. Molly managed to keep herself under control even as she levitated the limp bodies into the next room. Every one of them was underfed, dressed in rags, pale and bruised. It certainly wasn't the death camps of the muggle war, but it wasn't what she had thought the Ministry was supporting either.

"Are they all muggleborns Molly?"

"Yes Arthur, it seems so. Certainly purebloods, and I imagine mixed bloods, would have been adopted."

They worked on in silence, helping move the small thin bodies to the various rooms for revival and medical clearance.

The children were slowly gathering in the dinning hall, a greatly changed dining hall. It sparkled with new gleaming paint, polished wood floors, tablecloths of snowy linen, and all the food the children wanted. Good food, simple but plentiful. A mulligan stew, home baked bread, butter, juice, as much as they cared to eat. Several of the older ones were slipping bread into their pockets afraid the largess wouldn't last, hoarding to be ready for the hard times. None of the children were older than eleven.

Albus was the one who tumbled to what that meant. He remembered that during his time at Hogwarts he had seen not one student from the orphanage. He had assumed that the orphanage held only squibs. That was quite evidently not the case.

"Mrs. Smee what happens to the children when their Hogwarts letter comes?"

"Their Hogwarts letter? I've never seen such a thing. When the children turn eleven they are taken to another home, for older children."

"Who takes them Mrs. Smee?"

"It's always one of the board. Mr. Malfoy was here frequently, but any of them would come."

Albus had seen the death camps. After that he thought he was immune to the inhumanity of humans. He was somewhat encouraged to find that he could still be shocked.

Molly was leading a pale young boy, white blond, he could have been Draco's brother, to the table. He sat carefully, as if he expected pain. She scooped out some stew for him, a goodly portion and started to butter a hunk of bread.

"You shouldn't put so much on. The others need to have some."

His voice was light and reedy, he sounded painfully sincere. Molly nodded carefully and scraped off most of the butter, returning it to the dish.

"Better?"

The boy nodded. Molly got a bowl for herself and put a dollop of stew in it. Her stomach roiled.

Quite quickly her companion was finished with his small helping. Molly ladled another portion into his bowl.

"I mustn't. Only one helping."

"Tonight is special. You can have as much as you like. It is very good isn't it?"

Outside a company of goblins guards lined the edge of the property. Those curious enough made sure to pass on the opposite side of the street.

Inside the building beds were being transfigured for warmth and comfort. The bathrooms were repaired and stocked with thick fluffy towels held under a heating charm. New nightclothes and robes were ready for the children as they tottered towards their beds, full for once, their bodies healing, still in shock. There was a massive need for mental health care, but that could wait on a nights sleep. Hot chocolate was at every bedside, steeply laced with a calming drought.

Deep in a closed tin mine Albus and Alastor began the questioning. Remus, Dung and the Grim were hunting the last of the board of directors.

By dawn the picture was fairly clear. The Board was not completely corrupt, but nearly so. Many of the major contributors not only got their contributions back under the table, they got the funds the Ministry allocated for the orphanage. The orphanage survived on the pittance paid for the labor of the children. At eleven the children were taken away and killed. Albus was nearly certain that the orphanage had been established by Tom Riddle as one of his first efforts against muggleborns. It would have appealed to him to cause suffering among those like him, then kill them.

Alastor stumped off to give Her Majesty her morning briefing.

"She ain't going to care for this at all Albus. Have a plan ready."

The children were feed a generous breakfast and told to clean their rooms and then stay in them and be very quiet. They would not be working that day.

Albus leaned against a wall in the assembly room twirling his wand. Two walls of the room had fighters standing shoulder to shoulder. Anyone porting in would certainly go down under the concentrated power of a few dozen stunners. Mrs. Smeek stood so she could see through the double doorway leading to the assembly hall. She was quite looking forward to the overseers porting in.

Nearly a half hour after the usual time for the children to be ported out colors swirled in the center of the room. A few fired quickly, before the targets had fully formed. Most timed it perfectly. The dozen men who had come to clear up the evidence were blown into

the walls by the force of the stunners. It wasn't a spell that was known to be lethal but there was considerable power behind the spells. Those who survived their impact with the walls were stabilized by the mediwitches and removed to the Black Phoenix holding facility.

Albus had the four who were ill enough to be in hospital moved to the Hogwarts Infirmary. Madam Pomfrey started their care making an immediate call for a specialist in mental trauma.

Albus had hopes that he could find where the trace on the four in the Hogwarts infirmary intersected the trace on the children at the orphanage. Alastor was studying the maps for their next raid, back from listening to Her Majesty's very vocal displeasure that such a situation would exist.

"Somewhere near Little Hangleton Albus."

Hagrid and a squad of lycan fighters were watching the spot where the wards of Hogwarts dumped those attempting apparition. They were quite near the Forbidden Forest. The watchers never heard a sound as a century of elves appeared around them, armed and ready. Dobby stood with Hagrid and they waited.

"Ow did you know then?"

"The Headmaster is still able to reach those of us who served at Hogwarts.."

Hagrid nodded to himself. The elf lord and the half giant waited for anyone following the Trace on the sick children. After several hours, the group settled into shifts, on duty watchers, ready reserves, and those standing down for food or rest.

The soul of the Dark Lord drifted, directionless, empty of energy, a speck of malice wandering between planes of existence.

Tom's soul was bound to the living world as humans know it, unable to cross into what is beyond. Voldemort had bound himself, trapped himself to our plane, afraid.

Darkness drew him, as gravity draws us to the earth. The Dark Lord's soul was pulled to old evils, evils that were locked away in the Department of Mysteries. The voices behind the Veil increased by one.

Riddle became self aware as energy seeped back to him. It was a dark energy to match the place he found himself. Around him he sensed other presences, less strong, less discrete loci of force. Not only Dark things were there, some of the Light was also present, far away and warded. Riddle was always cautious. Before probing the light he would gain strength as he could and what knowledge there was to be had of this place. His business was not here, his ambition was only to leave, to gain dominion of the world of the sun. He began to search for a source of the dark energy he fed on. As he gained energy, slowly, so slowly, he reviewed his latest defeat.

The Dementors were most likely gone. The Light in the Dark in the possession of those who would destroy it.

His Death Eaters were shattered, hunted by that damnable Headmaster, almost destroyed.

He needed a body, a strong body, and time to make that body stronger yet. The dark rituals he had used to gain his former power required sacrifice and a purity of purpose. He had given up much of his humanity to gain much. His body had not been fully human when he was torn from it that Halloween of 1981. His soul had not been fully human either. Some of what he had sacrificed before he would never be able to give again. No matter what form his next body took he would be less than he had been. Tom found this less than acceptable.

Tom surveyed his surroundings. He was in what seemed like a tunnel between planes of being. One opening was the Veil in the Department of Mysteries, the other opening was blocked by wards no dark creature could stand to manipulate. The Ministry in its

rampant stupidity had not understood the nature of the Veil and had used it as means to execute the worst of magical Britannia. For centuries before it gained some measure of control over the Dementors, allowing the creation of Azkaban, those considered unfit for life had been sent through the Veil. Riddle was in the company of souls condemned on Earth but blocked from moving beyond. Of those present he alone could move back through the Veil, his soul anchors allowed him that passage.

Riddle attempted to exert power over the others. He could not affect them. He could not pull them back with him. He had gained as much as he could from his present condition, he was getting no stronger. He moved towards the blocked portion of the tunnel.

Tom Riddle was a genius with wards. No ward had ever kept him from his goal. Those wards that couldn't be broken, like the Fidelius, he went around. Riddle knew he would never be able to open the wards sealing the way forward. The wards were based on love and faith, things he could not abide much less manipulate. Riddle hadn't a clue what the wards were guarding; heaven, hell, or something else, but removing them was beyond his ability.

Riddle pulled himself back through the Veil into the world of the sun and began to search for a body. Had he failed to find one he would have lost energy and been pulled back through the Veil. In minutes he was moving a rat through the sewers of London. He used the animal quickly and moved to another. The day was about to get a lot darker at Borgin and Burke's. Tom had an old friend to see.

Borgin was conducting business as usual, cheating those he dared and having a grand time doing it. He had recently revised his business model due to market forces. He didn't seem to have much local demand for his products and so was building up a robust trade involving discrete overseas delivery. Magical Britannia had become most disgustingly light in tone. He had taken on a huge amount of inventory quite quickly as dark families liquidated heirloom grade assets in an effort to have the ready cash formerly required for custom fit justice. They were quite surprised to learn justice was not currently on blue light special at the Ministry.

It seemed that the Queen's justice was not for sale. Those found guilty were stripped of assets, brain wiped, and sent to a nunnery for re-education as "useful members of society". It was enough to make

a man sick. And very nervous. Lately Borgin had been seeing quite a bit of Mad Eye. That was enough to make a bloke very uneasy in his sleep. If Borgin ever stood to the question he would go down like a ton of lead. The Mark alone was enough to hie him to a nunnery. He considered moving overseas and returning only for buying trips. The more he thought of it the better the idea seemed.

His familiar, an old eagle owl, gave an unholy screech. Borgin whirled and ran for the back of his store. His owl was trained to warn him of danger and he had learned to heed it. Behind him wards sealed and the windows shaded, the store sign flipped to closed and the door locked. Borgin called for his familiar and dove through an illusion of a bookcase, tumbling down the stairs the illusion concealed. Below him now the owl fluttered to perch on the bust of demon that possessed the power to detect those of good heart approaching. The bust was dormant.

The entrance from the sales floor had sealed behind the two of them. Borgin gave in to his paranoia and decided right then and there to move his operation overseas. South America seemed a good place, nice and far, with a healthy dark tradition.

Borgin was packing as fast as he could, the elite of his treasures were stored in a Fidelius protected location, but he just couldn't leave behind as much profit as he would if he simply abandoned ship. He was to regret that.

He didn't notice the huge rat, the rat with glowing red eyes, crawling into the hidden chamber. As the rat died his owl's eyes went red. Borgin stood up slowly, turned, and bowed to his familiar.

"Master. What are your orders?"

Borgin was not Snape, or even Lucius, but he did have some skill at protecting his mind, and access to a vast array of magical devices. He was well shielded. The one chink in his armor was for his familiar. He had enjoyed quite a close bond with the owl due to a artifact, and the Dark Lord used it now.

"You will continue as you have planned. Move your business to Brazil, Rio de Janeiro has a large magical population. We will begin recruiting there."

Borgin felt the Dark Lord sift his memories for the news he required.

"Lucius dead? Most unfortunate. You will recall the others. They will assist you. It seems Britannia is not so welcoming as it once was. Interesting. We shall have to subvert the Queen, having control of her will give us control of everything. This will need to be most carefully done. Call the others and continue your move. Keep your familiar with you. I shall use this method of communication to further instruct you."

Borgin felt the presence of the Dark Lord lessen. His familiar fluttered to the floor in a spray of feathers, exhausted from the strain of hosting the Dark Lord. Borgin hurried from his shop to call the other two Death Eaters and make a stop at Eyelops for a restorative potion. He hustled back and continued to pack his shop.

Mad Eye heard about the impending departure of Borgin from Dung. Dung had watched a rather large supply of packing material and two strange men enter the closed, shuttered shop. The Black Phoenix heard nothing from their various contacts in Knockturn Alley. Alastor went to high alert and contacted the Headmaster.

Albus got the report that Borgin was getting set to do a runner and decided on to put together a raid. It was something they had considered often, raiding the store, but had held off hoping to net any fish still in the pond. By dawn the Black Phoenix was surrounding the building. Albus, Moody and Bill Weasley would go in the first wave. Elements of MI5 stood ready with muggle equipment to assist.

Albus called Fawkes to him and asked to be taken to Borgin. In a flash of Phoenix fire the Headmaster disappeared. Moody and Bill crashed the wards and blew the door into the interior. They moved carefully into the room. Only a fool would rush this approach, there were too many opportunities for a trap in a shop full to the brim with potent dark artifacts. It took them fifteen minutes to cross the room. Even then they were both bleeding and singed. Fawkes had ferried in others. Moody and Bill prayed that the Headmaster was well, the first in had been their medi-witch.

Albus had flamed into the hidden storage below Borgin and Burke's. He had immediately apparated across the room and spun out a series of high energy stunners. His other hand held his light saber.

He dropped two men just starting to reach for their wands. Borgin had portkeyed out at the same time as Albus had flashed in. The Headmaster only saw a flip of Borgin's robe phasing away. Fawkes had launched himself at an old black eagle owl with a full war cry. The Headmaster saw the eyes of the owl switch from red to gold just as Fawkes flamed next to it. Riddle had escaped the phoenix, although the owl hadn't. The black bird thumped to the floor, smoking.

One of the men had collapsed onto some sort of edged weapon he had been packing and was bleeding heavily. Albus asked Fawkes to bring in the medi-witch. He stood without moving, waiting for the arrival of the others, mentally casting about for Riddle. The place was awash in darkness, Riddle's faint echo was masked by the background noise of the many artifacts and Albus wasn't able to single him out. A sewer rat crept away from the store and towards Borgin's high security storage. The Dark Lord had a single follower free now. A single follower except for Snape and Karkaroff who still bore his Mark.

"Now is not the time to discover Snape's true loyalty. I dare not test him with so little to bind him to my cause. Still, he is a powerful piece, in a good position. As is Karkaroff. Karkaroff I will kill for his disloyalty, but perhaps there is a use for him first. He is too careful and too carefully watched at Durmstrang. They remember Grindelwald there, he will be difficult to get to."

The Black Phoenix moved the contents of the shop to the same vault that held the artifacts Bill had identified as dark from both Malfoy Manor and the Black's London house. Albus made a decision to have Bill comb through the remaining vaults of the Death Eaters. Their estates had been seized by the Crown to disburse to their victims. He told Bill about his new assignment when Alastor and Bill finally made it to the chamber. The medi-witch immediately began to cluck and fuss over their various burns and cuts as was appropriate to her calling. She was almost as good as Poppy, the men were feeling much better before the hour was out.

The team stood down once the building was secure and empty. Remus had provided an assist by recruited some of his lycan villagers for a quick stevedore job. Bill and Albus made plans to go through the seized vaults the next day. Moody would continue to search for Borgin, with the aid of Fawkes.

Bill and Albus spent the next day in negotiations with the goblins of Gringotts over access to the vaults of the convicted Death Eaters. The goblins had their reputation to uphold as custodians of the wealth of the magical world. If Gringotts lost the faith of their depositors, they lost the control of the limitless treasure they held under lock and key.

The Wizengamot had sentenced the convicted Death Eaters to a mind wipe, reeducation, and seizure of their assets. Sufficient assets would be left for familial support. The families would also retain any non Dark heirloom items. The assets stripped were for distribution to victims where known and to support organizations that aided those victims such as St. Mungo's. The decisions were legally binding and so a form of contract. Nothing, but nothing, was more sacred to a Gringotts goblin than a contract. Control of the wealth of the wizarding world was being shuffled to new owners, large concentrations of assets were being redistributed. The goblins were very reluctant to allow anyone other than the owners of the vault entrance. It was only when Albus and Bill were able to produce documentation proving that they were operating under the direct order of the Crown that they were allowed to review the contents of the vaults. The struggle over what constituted an heirloom grade asset and what exactly was considered to be a Dark artifact would keep the Wizengamot busy and the solicitors happy for the next hundred years.

The unlikely pair removed themselves to the Leaky Cauldron for adult beverage in vast quantities at the end of a long and spirited discussion. They had finally reached a reasonable solution that allowed the goblins a tidy profit in the form of a fee for a special audit and allowed Bill and Albus access to the vaults under goblin oversight.

"I thought we would have to wrestle Griphook to the ground before he would see reason. It was beginning to look like right of conquest was the only way forward."

Albus chuckled, sipping a very fine firewhiskey. He especially liked this vintage as the smoke pouring from his ears changed color to clash rather magnificently with his robes.

"They were most adamant. Thank Merlin that is behind us. Tomorrow we can begin the actual review of contents. I have been dreading this day, I have never cared for jumble sales, especially on such a massive scale."

Bill snorted smoke from both his nose and ears. Albus had timed it well.

"My mum would go spare, she loves a boot sale. Has a very good eye for value does mum."

The winnowing of the vaults took them the better part of a month. Albus could move through the vaults quickly and isolate objects for Bill to render harmless. Those things they couldn't defuse were put in the holding vault for destruction. Goblin security had been put on high alert after several attempts by various means to enter the vault area.

It was in the LeStrange vault that they struck gold. The Hufflepuff cup was easily the darkest object they had recovered.

The shade of Riddle watched them move his horocrux to the vault holding those artifacts slated for destruction. His diary gone, his cup, his familiar Nagini, all gone now. Damnable Dumbledore was certain to figure out what he had done if he hadn't already. Borgin had proven unequal to the task of entering the LeStrange vault. He lacked the skills Quirell had enjoyed as well as Quirell's magical power. Like Lucius before him he had refused the Dark Lord possession of his soul. Borgin was proving troublesome, just as Lucius had. The idiot intended to manage the return of his master for his benefit.

"Damnable Slytherins, always looking for an advantage, not an ounce of loyalty."

Once Riddle had a physical form capable of magic he would exact his full measure of revenge.

The Dark Lord began his slow migration towards the location of his other soul fragments using the animals he found to sustain his presence in the world, moving quickly to the next as he killed his host by his presence, a gruesome hopscotch. Prudence dictated that he check his other anchors, and that he do it himself. He would

check the ring first, then the locket and finally the diadem. Of course the diadem was safe, even Dumbledore would never find that. The hiding place was brilliant. Hogwarts was under McGonagall now, she wasn't in Dumbledore's league in either power or subtlety. Once he was assured of the diadems safety at Hogwarts he would possess an acromantula. The spider would sustain him for his trip to Brazil, and his careful rebuilding of both his personal power as well as his forces. It galled him to think he was being forced from magical Britannia.

The acromantula crouched at the edge of Hogsmeade. His ring and diadem were safe, his locket was gone. The locket had the most robust protections he could devise protecting it and still it was gone. Riddle had done the Arithmancy, he dare not lose another piece of his soul, what was left would not be viable, he would be as good as kissed should he create another horcrux.

Hogwarts had been illuminating. Snape had resisted his possession but not his influence, Snape was assuredly a double agent and his loyalty was in question despite what Dumbledore assumed. It was Riddle that had caused him to attack the mudblood. He had been most impressed with her skill, most impressed indeed. Those glowing blades she and the Pomfrey girl had used had been effective as a shielding device, diverting spells. The Pomfrey girl was likely the mudbloods equal in a fight. His probes of their minds had met with nothing, they were concentrating on the fight, he detected nothing out of order other than their deviance. Certainly Severus had a feverish imagination that fueled his willingness to attack the mudblood, he really was most conflicted, quite amusing really. The Dark lord knew that he would face those two one at a time, together they would be very difficult to defeat.

Borgin appeared a few meters away, he looked extremely nervous. With him was a large crate, stamped and stickered for international shipment, muggle security seals in place. It was the work of a minute to have his spider form inside and resting comfortably, the seals flawless after a quick reparo. Borgin took hold of the crate and apparated to Liverpool, they would be taking ship for Rio that afternoon, his crate would need to be on board in the next hour.

"Borgin, so glad you could make it. All is arranged as we planned?"

"Yes my Lord, we have a bit of time before this crate must be on the docks and the portkey is set to take you to the proper place in a minute. Hare you any further instructions for me my Lord?"

"Nothing. What have you heard from Karkaroff?"

"He has not answered my Lord. I have repeated attempts to contact him under the pretext that I would like to hire him to evaluate a rare piece I was considering, he has not responded. Should I reveal that I ask for his presence on your behalf?"

"It is well that you haven't taken it on yourself to do such a foolish thing. I would torture you long for such an error. You will follow my instructions exactly, no more, no less."

"Yes Lord, it shall be as you command."

The portkey activated carrying the Dark Lord to the bonded warehouse for loading aboard their ship. The Dark Lord was going into exile. He had much to consider as the ship slipped it's moorings and headed to South America. The Pomfrey chit, the weapons the girls had used, their skills but most importantly his anchors, his horcruxes. The ring was at risk, but moving it would be an even greater risk, he dare not attempt it in his weakened state. He would trust to his protections, and hope that the Headmaster was so busy with other tasks that he wouldn't have occasion to conduct research into his life. His found his state of weakness terrifying and disgusting. He was weaker than he had ever been in physical form.

The rodent population of the ship dropped rapidly during the voyage. The crew felt extremely reluctant to conduct any maintenance or even to come near to the hold that held the Dark Lords spider.

Rio displeased him in many ways. The sun, the heat, the excitement of the people. It was a very long way from the cliffs of Dover. Borgin set up shop easily in the magical district, finding an analog of Knockturn Alley like a duck finds water. He had a shop close to the middle of Ruela de Escuro Mágica. Slowly his business gained a client base, and his master followers. It was the work of months before his master was ready to regain a limited corporal form.

The Dark Lord had studied extensively in the blackest of magics. He had seen mention of a Thai ritual that involved a baby and

possession by a supernatural power. The ritual required the still living fetus of a dead woman be removed from her womb and a ritual preformed.

In a hidden location a woman of poverty, Bea Curvantes a witch, was bleeding out. Borgin, pale, shaking held the knife that had cut her throat. When the blood stopped sturting and dripped, he cut open her abdomen. She was very very pregnant, the fetus twitched in the last protection it would know. Quickly he cut the baby free and laid him on the nearby altar. Those who had sworn to the presence in their minds began the chant, drums pounded. The enormous spider stalked among them, red eyes gleaming. Borgin cut open the chest of the infant, ignoring the terrified shrieks of the child. The tiny heart was exposed, pulsing erratically, shutting down. Quickly the spider mounted the table, lowering itself next to the faintly squirming baby. Borgin cut the carapace of the spider open and reached into it for the beating heart slicing it free. The heart continued to pulse. Several in the room were rather violently sick seeing the devastation, the blood, the screams of one so innocent, the clicking and rattle of the spider dying. Borgin threw up and cut the babys heart out. He dropped it, still beating into a cauldron, and fumbled the spider organ into the chest of the infant. While he muttered through a curse that Voldemort had designed he heard the others chanting around the cauldron.

His part was done but for placing the baby in the bath. He was close to madness. Before him was a grayish white twisted form, huge scars crossed it's chest, there was no breath, no pulse. Borgin was sure he would have fallen insane on the spot if he had seen either sign of life in the thing before him. The drums faltered and stuttered as the drummers writhed against the compulsion to continue. When the chanting over the cauldron stopped Borgin picked up the tiny corpse, the still gray baby into the cauldron.

He was never able to remember what came next. He considered that the blessing of his life.

He became aware that he held a small form, as small as a baby, in his arms. There was a weak cry and a thought in his mind.

"I need to be fed, give me the solution prepared, quickly!"

Borgin turned and picked up a bottle full of red liquid, the blood of the mother mixed with venom from the spider. He began to feed his Master. He would have blessed death at any time from that moment on.

They began a rotation of care for the thing, their Master. It grew stronger with each feeding, increasing in size daily. The thing produced no waste, and had no reproductive organs. Its eyes were slits, glowing red. It rarely slept. By the end of the first week it had doubled in size. They fed it once a day and avoided it if they could, much of its time was alone. The soft tissues hadn't formed to make speech possible yet, and the magical core was very small. It would be some time before the Dark Lord would be able to do any significant magic.

By the time several weeks had passed the Dark Lord had stopped growing. He would never be large in this form, he was a bit bigger than Flitwick. His magical core had developed to be large but not overwhelmingly so. He marked his newest Death Eaters. Months passed as he and his followers recruited. Voldemort gathered together the material required for rituals that would grant him even more power, increase his magical ability. He had lost his yew and phoenix wand at Azkaban but that was just as well, it would most likely not work for him in his present state.

The first raid of his Death Eaters was on a wand shop in the magical shopping district. He had drilled his minions in the spells and tactics he expected of them, the ones that had been so effective in Britannia. His freelance ward breaker got to work while his followers set up positions to hold a perimeter around the shop. The ward breaker proved his worth. It was minutes only before the wards collapsed with a crash. The Dark Lord entered the shop and began summoning wands into expanded crates along with a few of his Death Eaters. The boxes were portkeys and activated on the sealing of their tops. The Dark Lord heard the pops of apparation. It seemed the Brazilian Aurors were quite efficient.

Four of the six responding to the alarm were felled in the first volley of killing curses. The Dark Lord killed one of his Death Eaters who stood to expose himself and taunt the Aurors. The remainder of his forces fought very carefully indeed after that. The remaining Auror pair was pinned down, their cover eroding under the constant barrage of blasting hexes. Soon enough they would be dead. In the

distance he heard two distinct series of pops. Two squads had arrived and far enough back that they would flank his positions. He ordered his men into the store. The packing crew had gotten a considerable portion of the available stock out when he had his men each summon a box full and port out with it. Before he left he sealed the building and set FiendFyre in it.

One of his men had taken the safe from the building. He died for not following orders. It took the fool a long time to die, he might have been stupid but he was tough. Riddle didn't even attempt to open the safe. Any fool would have a trace on the safe, and enough protections to allow an Auror response. He banished the safe. Two more died once they arrived at a secondary safe house. He selected them and allowed the others to have their way with them. After all it had been a good first effort considering the level of training he had been able to give them and their excitable Latin nature.

While his followers amused themselves he began testing wands. The party was long over and he was alone when he finished. He had found several good matches, but none as fine as his old wand. Setting portkeys on the boxes of wands that he didn't choose, he sent them to a storage he had created known only to him. All in all a good nights work.

Riddle considered his position. The next raid would be purely for entertainment, he would take his troops out to enjoy some muggle hunting, perhaps a bit of rapine, some looting if there was time. His Death Eaters had suffered a morale loss, they had lost three of their number. All the losses had come from either his hand or at his order but still, they seemed less than secure in their belief in him. They had seen the stick, it was time for some carrot.

The International Prophet Tribune

Yesterday Rio de Janeiro was shocked by a bold attack against a poor section of the city. Witnesses described a group of magicals destroying a wide area of one of Rio's poorest neighborhoods. The complete death count is not known at this time but may reach several hundred. The despicable terrorists wore black robes and white masks. Pictures from the scene show the Dark Mark over several locations. Our correspondent in Rio was able to speak to some of the survivors of the attack. There can be no doubt that the

attack was conducted by magical forces that closely resemble the Death Eaters of You Know Who. Our man in Rio spoke to one survivor at hospital being treated for Cruciatus symptoms who said the leader of the group was a very small deformed youth with glowing red eyes slits for nostrils. None of the attacking forces were captured, although one was thought to be badly injured by a squad of Aurors responding to the scene.

Like many of the attacks against muggles during the fight with He Who Must Not Be Named there seems to be no reason for the attack other than to disrupt society, have a large body count, and amuse his followers. We at the International Tribune wish our Brazilian friends well. If this is indeed the start of the Dark Lords rise to power we hope that our Ministry will seriously consider lending aid to avert what may become a very serious situation.

Riddle began a series of raids that were designed to enrich his cause. His followers emptied bank vaults, jewelry stores, armories. He took over a major portion of the drug trade and with that found himself in some semblance of control of many of the levers of power. The muggles were useless against him, however the Brazilian Aurors were well trained and used to terrorist tactics. He began to subvert the magical government with well placed Imperio's and a few paid spies.

He still lacked a significant portion of the magical power he once had. If he could be brought to battle he could be defeated by a very skilled duelist. Dumbledore would make mince meat of him, as would Moody.

He continued his search for ways to increase his power but was finding few. Dark magic required sacrifice. Personal power required personal sacrifice. He had not enough left of his humanity to be able to lose any more of it. His current body was barely alive, held together with a diminishing supply of the blood of the woman whose child he had butchered for this body. The only ritual that had a chance would require that he return to Britannia, to Little Hangleton, to the grave of his father. Willing servants he had, and enemies aplenty, but none of the father he had to take at the graveside.

He set about making his plans for a return. A quick return at the right time, a bit of a wait, and he would have the body he required, stronger than before, more powerful. The Quidditch World Cup

would be in England, he would return under the cover of that mass migration. Borgin would remain, he was too well known to return. He would take a cadre of his best with him, they were not the inner circle of old, but they would serve. They would serve or he would kill them slowly, begging for death. Perhaps this evening would be a good time to reinforce the lesson of his mastery. He called a Death Eater to him and pressed his Mark.

Harry sat propped against the headboard of her bed making Christmas presents. She had a dwindling pile of galleons before her on a lap table. She was transfiguring the gold into jewelry and setting runic protections into the result. She had learned how to cause magical energy to be drawn off and stored in a suitable item earlier in the year, just recently she had found out how to stop that drain at a desired level. Once fully charged her presents would be very potent magical artifacts. She had consulted closely with Professor Babbling to ensure her rune scheme accomplish her aims. She etched the runes for detection of evil intent and defense of mind and body into her jewelry.

For the boys she had created medallion pendants of the Gryffindor lion that she hung on a flat gold chain. She had used rubies for eyes, one engraved with the runes to protect the body, the other with runes to protect the mind. As she worked she marveled at the human body. It was difficult to imagine the evolutionary path that allowed someones hand to manipulate tools at the microscopic level, but there it was, she was carving runes so small she was using a high powered magnifying spell to be able to see her work. The girls would get a more delicate version of the medallion, with a fine chain. The engraving would be more difficult so Harry was doing the boys first. Hagrid's had been the most expensive, for the medallion to be anything like appropriate on him had taken quite a few galleons and you could move logs with the chain. Harry had the goblins raid the Potter vaults for the rubies, the galleons as well actually.

Harry hummed an old tune, one that Limpy had sung her to sleep with back in San Francisco. She was happy, unworried, and enjoying using her skills, pretty much perfectly content. It felt odd. Humming she worked along, cozy in her runic pajamas.

Christmas was coming up fast, soon the term would end. The girls were scheduled for a trip to the Alps for skiing with the Grangers starting the day after Christmas. They had filed their edges and their teeth dreaming of all that lovely vertical.

Their demon combat instructor - physical trainer had allowed them the term break to do as they saw fit. He had allowed that they might not hurt themselves to badly if they were to get into a donnybrook provided it was amongst themselves. Against any real opposition they would be best served by running.

Hermione said he had smiled with they gave him the present they had clubbed up to get him. The others were rather vocal in their disbelief. They all agreed he liked the goblin made dagger but most were of the opinion that he was hatched, had never smiled, and never would smile.

He informed the group that after the term break they would be starting edged weapons training. He gave off a faint whiff of resignation at the smirks spread amongst his squad.

Sir was not used to having his pronouncements dismissed without concern. He fought to not roll his eyes or sigh. Likely he would have to train them out of their bad habits. They seemed to think they knew something about the use of blades. Happily contemplating the number and severity of the bruises he would be dishing out in a fortnight he dismissed them to their breakfast.

Harry pulled some long nights getting all her presents made but managed to finish the last of them the night before the term ended. She slept the sleep of the just and woke to Hermione's prodding fingers.

"Geroofff."

"Harry we have to get going, you need breakfast and it's almost over. Move it girl!"

"Mrffft."

Her cozy cocoon disappeared with her covers. Hermione laughed at her growling.

"Up Up Up, the day is fine and your wasting it here sleeping! We should be eating and getting ready to leave!"

Hermione was bouncing, literally bouncing with excitement, hair flying, arms waving, spinning like a dervish. It was all too much for a layabout.

"OK Polly Sunshine, I'm up. Now stop that damn moving around. You can't expect me to suffer that in my condition."

"Your delicate condition my dear? If you had started whatever that was you were hiding in your bed doing you would have had it finished so you would have had enough sleep and you would be bouncing as is only right and just."

Hermione continued to bounce, twirl and chatter. It was disgusting. Harry headed to the shower to avoid losing any more ground in a verbal joust to Miss Highly Over Caffeinated Demon Woman.

The gang helped one another to boost their trunks into the baggage car and piled into a some compartments close together. Harry, Hermione, Ron, Ginny, Neville, Luna and the twins wandered back and forth welcoming whoever was brave enough to step foot into their swirling pool of chaos. At one point in the ride Harry had gotten each light saber from it's owner and upgraded the blades to have a training setting. The blades wouldn't cut flesh although they would burn handily.

Neville got curious, he was interested Harry's creative process.

"How do you do that Harry? No one else can make one of these, no one else can use one that wasn't made for them, and now you can make them act differently? How do you do it? Is it transfiguration? You don't use a spell, you just blank out for a second and it's done. What are you doing?"

She-Who-Was-Hyper poked at Harry.

"So Harry, try to explain this again."

Hermione loved Christmas a bit to much for others to retain sanity.

"I just see what I want done and ask my magic to do it. It does. I think no one else can use them because I make them out of wands that have chosen the user. If the saber hasn't chosen you it won't work for you. The movies gave me a good idea about a sabers capabilities so I knew pretty clearly what I wanted. I haven't tried to make them out of anything but a wand, I don't think it would work with anything else."

"Why not sweetie?"

She-Who-Was-Hyper settled into the seat next to Harry and proceeded to burrow into her side.

"Well because I use magic to create them, not the Force. Remember the Romans Mione? They used a power that wasn't magic. Still it was a power. Maybe there is a Force, but I can't tap into it, at least not now. A wand has power of it's own, some are stronger than others. That doesn't seem to effect a saber though. I don't think they use much power for all they can do. I think they use a pinch of our magical power to light off and then they just exist until we turn off the connection."

"I would love to know the Arithmancy behind them. I wonder if we could describe the result and work backwards from there to what must be the creation?"

"Is there anything else you do like that Harry?"

"Aye Nev, the firmware upgrades, you all have them, the enhanced reflexes and senses. Not always a blessing with some to the boys being a bit on the lax side about the showers, and Lav's perfume, sweet suffering Merlin."

Neville stared at Harry for a minute. He opened his mouth, glanced at her scar and slowly shut his mouth again. Harry could see him come to his conclusion and decide now was not the place.

"Thanks Nev."

He blushed and nodded then settled back into his seat and himself, deep in thought. Beside him Luna was curled up, knowledge in her eyes as well.

"Hows everyone coming with Occulumency?"

Ron shifted a bit nervously.

"I think I'm ready for a test, seems like I nearly have it."

Harry pulled her wand and raised an eyebrow.

"May I?"

He nodded and stared into her eyes.

She pointed the holly wand at him and murmured "Legilimens".

He did have strong walls, and met her before them, an avatar of himself, he did himself no kindness, he appeared thinner and extremely nervous, clumsy.

"Looking good Ron. How do you want to do this? I can just try to power my way through or?"

"Yeah, ok, try the fort."

Harry searched for a door and didn't see one. She walked completely around the wall but there didn't seem to be an opening. She paused a bit. This was Ron, chess master, determined fighter, lazy git of a student. She walked to the wall and began to feel it for some hint of an opening. He had to have a way in and out. But wait, Ron loved to fly! Harry imagined a broomstick and hopped on it, sure she was about to soar over the walls. Ron's second tier defenses triggered. Dragons launched at Harry and defended their territory. She knew she wasn't going to get through them, they had overlapping fields of fire and wouldn't move from position. She grounded and tried a straight on breach of the walls. There was plenty of dust and explosions, masses of material surrounded her. She stopped and checked her progress. At this rate she would take half of forever to get through the defenses. As she watched they rebuilt themselves.

"Alright Ron, I think that's a pass. Very nice job. Your dragons were excellent, I couldn't get them out of position and I can't breach your wall without a total effort that would hurt one of us. You will need to work with the Flamels for the rest of it, I can't show you anything. You should be safe from anything but direct contact with a very strong Occulumens."

"Thanks Harry. Harry are you ever going back to a boy?"

"Uhh What do you mean go back to a boy? Are you mad?"

"Come on Harry I'm not dumb, neither are the rest of them, we all know, we are just waiting for you to make it official."

"I'm his twin Ron. We were separated at birth so there would be a Potter that survived."

"This isn't necessary. We know. We will keep your secrets like, well like house elves used to huh?"

She could feel the wry grin on him. Fawkes had told her if she wanted the truth she should give it. She could feel him there, bit down on himself, not a lot of sun reached a bloom so low on the vine.

"Ron I changed before I can really remember. Sometimes in dreams I hear screaming and see a green flash, I think that was the night He killed my parents. Sometimes I feel a lot of pain and hear a lot of yelling and it hurts to breathe and I'm numb- that's when my uncle almost killed me after I changed. Since I've known the difference I've been a girl.

I've killed enough, been in enough bad fights that I don't want any more. But it isn't about what I want. If we don't stop him he will come for Hermione, and everyone like her. I can't let that happen. Yeah I was born Harry James Potter. But now I'm Harriet Pomfrey."

"Well if you went back to Potter, you and Hermione, that would be an easy thing."

"Aye."

There was a very long minute. They stared into each others eyes, neither blinking.

"You love her don't you?"

Harry brought her feeling for Hermione to the fore and showed them to Ron. He recoiled as if he had been hit, or had seen the Rapture.

"Yes, I think I have since I first saw her on the train. Certainly before the first year was out."

"How did you learn to do that? To love like that? I don't think you should have shown me."

His avatar stared at his feet, he kicked the ground blushing.

"I want that. I think that's all I ever wanted."

"I was told not to worry about me. That love was it's own reward, and that I would be rewarded by the act itself. I don't manage it very often, my stupid expectations and desires get in the way. But that is what I was told."

He nodded, still looking down. She reached over to him and tilted his chin up until their eyes met. She brought her feelings for him to the front and showed him. His eyes watered up and he nodded.

"Brother."

They settled back into their own minds and broke eye contact. Ron stood, a bit unsteadily and took his usual long loping strides out of the compartment. Harry snuffed a bit and dried her eyes on her sleeve.

"Oh butch, here, have a hankie."

Harry took the offering from her Mione and wiped, honked, and cleaned up.

"He has great shields, anyone else ready for a checkup? Hermione's turn to drive though."

"Don't you volunteer me you hussy!"

"Hussy is it? En garde!"

Soon the whole compartment was a wriggling pile of an all out tickle war. Luna captured Neville and refused any quarter until double teamed by Ginny and Harry. Luna had refused to laugh until both sides and armpits were under assault, then she broke like a ripe melon. She was quickly at the stage of being unable to breathe. After intense multi-party diplomatic negotiations and occasional raids a cease fire was instituted and held.

Harry and Hermione went on a expedition into Slytherin territory to give Millie her Christmas presents. There was a bit of barbed kidding about geeks bearing gifts, but no one pushed it to far and they were able to leave the area without bad feelings on either side. Millie was actually very glad they had come to her. She locked in as head of

her house on that visit just as they had planned during training. Both girls hid a bit of a shock at Ron's being in the compartment with Millie. He looked flushed and happy, with a glow in his eye that Harry was glad to see. Perhaps the sun had made it to the lower flower on the vine.

The girls wandered back up the train hand in hand, giving the one finger salute to any who thought their opinion was needed even if not sought. A peaceful excited throng poured from the express onto the platform at Kings Cross, happy to see family for the holidays. The Grangers collected a bubbling Hermione, and Harry caught her portkey to The Farm to spend Christmas day with her Aunties. On Boxing Day the Grangers and Harry would board the Eurostar Chunnel train headed for the Alps and some very serious skiing.

Harry was quite pleased with the reaction she got from her presents of protective medallions. The workmanship was exquisite and the protection they would provide would be significant once they were charged. Dobby and Limpy popped to the Farm to exchange presents and to go caroling in the werewolf village along with the Weasleys, the Grangers and Sirius.

Once again the true blessing of the season was in the singing in the village square, with the families of the village joining in. The year of full employment and better legal protections had made a huge difference in the people singing in the square. Albus and Poppy had been able to fit magical limbs to the many who had them the night Remus had taken command of the pack. It was delicate masterful magic and quite demanding, it wasn't possible for just anyone to do this work, but Albus and Poppy had slowly gotten it done.

A very excited Harry was up very, very early and ready for her assault on the Alps. They were headed to St. Moritz, a fabled ski town with access to hundreds of miles of vertical, much of it available easily with the girls ability to pop the adults to any slope they could see. St. Moritz was a wonderful place quite able to absorb any amount of money without a ripple.

The high speed trains were amazing, that something so big could go so fast just fascinated Harry. They had left London and arrived at the Gare de Nord in Paris just before 1pm. They had a quick lunch and boarded the TGV connection to Zurich from the Gard de l'Est. The train was equipped with a cafe/bar car so they ate on the train

humming and cooing over the maps of the ski terrain around St. Moritz as they blasted across France moving over 200 mph. It was a frantic hustle to make the connection to Chur where they changed to the narrow gauge Rhätische Bahn to St. Moritz. By midnight the exhausted travelers were checked in and asleep. The journey would have been much more difficult if they had been lugging full ski equipment like some they saw. Shrinking and featherweight charms were the perfect travelers aid.

Harry was stunned by the high speed trains. She began to plot her next runic project. The Grangers medallions Harry and Hermione charged from their staffs, putting quite a few weeks worth of runic pajamas magic into the charms. Neither was sure if the medallions would stay charged or if the power would bleed off gradually and need to be refreshed.

They skied hard and long, kept comfortable and safe by magic. Close to their last day the Grangers were off on another mountain while the girls were hunting for the steep and deep. They were in a lift line, chattering and laughing about the days skiing when Harry felt danger around them. It was nothing certain, nothing concrete, but she was sure there was a fight coming. She leaned close to Hermione while inspecting her boots and whispered to her.

"Mione get ready for a fight, something is wrong, can you feel it?"

Hermione made a soft humming noise of agreement. They slipped out of their skis, racked them on the sides of the tram, and boarded. The car lurched away from the boarding station and rocked up the mountainside, quickly settling into a soft rumble of cables over distant pulleys. The sense of unease grew. Harry closed her eyes and tried to find the threat just as she searched for the stinging hexes in saber practice. She expanded her senses out to the edge of the tram. There were five of them and they were aware, ready. Two on either side of the door and one behind them. Pitching her voice low and soft Harry murmured to Hermione.

"Four on the doorway, one behind, looks like they want to take us alive. It would have been easy to snap the cable if they didn't."

Hermione's voice was just as quiet.

"That would just hurt the muggles though, they probably know that. Any idea who they are?"

"Eaters, I can feel the Mark. See if you can sense them."

Hermione looked casually around the car, a mild legilimens probe whenever anyone met her eyes. She held her face still when she felt them but a long shower with much scrubbing would be needed. They were so corrupt, and so enraptured with their evil, vile and glad of it.

"Harry, how can anyone do that to themselves? We don't go easy on them. What plan do you suppose? Portkey?"

"PORTKEY, shite, I don't want to go anywhere they think we should. Hang back while everyone else gets out, staff and saber. Impermeability shield as soon as anything starts, I have no intention of going anywhere they want us to."

The tram swooped and slowed coming into the station. The girls faded back to either side of the single enemy across from the doors. Harry couldn't help herself.

"Nice day for it. Hows Tommy boy doing by the way?"

The man she was speaking to sneered but kept his eyes forward.

"You will come with us if you want her parents to live."

That was the wrong answer. The surge of the crowd out of the car kept the other four out of play. Their enemy was still falling when the emergency portkey Auntie Poppy had insisted on them carrying activated and he disappeared. Harry disillusioned herself and silenced her boots under the cover of the portkey. The last of the skiers were out the door, the attendants were calling for the five remaining in the car to exit. A man with a belly of importance was headed in their direction, the universal frown of authority plastered on his face, cheeks flushing red. The pair to the left of the door collapsed onto the aluminum decking of the car. Hermione sighed softly and cast.

"Stupify"

One cast.

"Protego!"

Her stunner blasted into the ceiling of the car, peeling back aluminum. His partner cast

"Augamente"

The water jet arced quickly across the car, outlining Harry a second after she shot a seriously overpowered Reducto at the pair. The shield groaned and collapsed. Hermione cast another high powered stunner and dropped half the crowd on the boarding platform including their opponents. The girls stepped from the car and began stripping weapons from their opponents. Wands, portkeys, pistols, potions, knives, rings and other accoutrement went into a hastily constructed box. He of the important belly was standing over them cursing in five languages that they were sure of. He seemed to be very worried about his tram.

The popping of an Auror team and some Obliviators was music to the girls' ears. Very quickly the Swiss Ministry had the cable humming again, the car repaired, the important stomach settled, and the skiers on their way.

The release of the girls would take a little more time. Actually quite a bit more time. Really half of forever. Bureaucratic wheels were set in motion and once in motion remained in motion until all the Ministerial men with important stomachs were satisfied. Of course that meant Minister Bones would be disturbed. The girls considered that one bright spot. Someone somewhere was poking a sleeping dragon.

Hermione had started on the Aurors even before they had left the platform. She would know that her parents were safe. The girls refused to answer anything, indeed refused to talk about anything else, until they knew that the Grangers were safe.

Emma and Daniel were not best pleased to have their quiet teen free afternoon rendezvous disturbed by Aurors. At first the Grangers were frantic that something had happened to the girls, by the time the language difficulties had been sorted and everyone reassured as to the welfare of everyone else the Swiss Aurors were ready to declare war on Britannia.

It was just before midnight that the Grangers and Harry made it back to their lodging. Everyone was grumpy and hungry. Room service in a five star hotel eased their frustrations quite a bit.

Harry and Hermione sat on a couch slumped together. Her parents had just shuffled off to bed after warning the girls how early the lifts started. Hot chocolate steamed on the low table before the fire. For the first time since the fast nasty fight in the tram they were alone. Harry was jolted to think how long it had been since they had been in a room with no one else in it. Months really.

"Mione?"

"Hmmm?"

Harry slipped an arm around her and cinched her close. She turned her head and buried her nose in Hermione's hair. The sharp fresh smell of sun and huge volumes of cold clean air, and vanilla. Desire pooled in her belly, her blood ran heavy, hot.

"May I kiss you?"

Hermione's breath hitched, her nerves stretched tight. She turned and stared at Harry, Harry's green eyes, almost glowing, with a frown line just starting.

"Look in my mind Mione."

Harry lowered her barriers and welcomed her love into her mind. Hermione saw Harry, body in shadow, shifting, unsettled, sharp of feature, the glowing green eyes and lustrous raven mop, a natural disaster of hair. She felt the desire of Harry for her, for the bookish, bushy haired bossy know it all with oversized front teeth. The heat of the desire was unexpected, intoxicating.

"No. that is not what you are, see you as I see you."

Hermione barely recognized the young woman Harry showed her. This woman was lovely, alive, sparking with vitality and joy and brilliance. This woman was the smartest woman of the age, and braver than she was smart. This woman was beautiful in a living way.

She was not a runway model, she was a real loving person and infinitely desirable.

"That's.. That's not me Harry. That person doesn't exist."

"She does, I am looking at her. Look through my eyes."

It was an unconditional surrender of Harry's will to her. She saw herself not in a mirror as a cold reflection, but colored and warm by her living being, the reality of her that wasn't captured in a photo or a mirror, but unmistakable to any who knew her.

She drew back from Harry's eyes, keeping a toehold in her mind as she leaned forward inches and soft lips met soft lips while loving hands drew heated patterns on skin. Hermione's sense of wrongness in physically loving Harry, that wrongness seeped away in face of the reality of soft touch, tender kiss, loving heart. It might not be right for everyone but it was right and good for them. Harry loved her, truly and deeply, just as she loved Harry.

Forever is a long time. They were young, just beginning to be aware of themselves as self directed adults. They could decide for themselves what fit for them and what didn't. They would accept the cost exacted but it would be with the awareness of choice.

It was a few hours before they went to their room to sleep, carrying a secret thing, new and precious with them.

Madam Bones sent a representative to the questioning of the attackers. The Swiss were of the same philosophy as Britannia concerning the questioning of marked Death Eaters. A good mind probe and some Veritiserum were the stuff of truth.

All five were marked. They were a mixed lot, one was even muggleborn. It seemed that the Dark Lord was much more interested in filling his ranks with wands than worrying who carried them. All of them were from South America, mostly Rio. The Dark Lord was much more lenient with his followers. Their memories of suffering his displeasure were infrequent. He was training the best of them himself, others were instructed by those he trained. All were

required to bring in more members. His forces in Rio were though to number in nearly one hundred already.

This team had been sent on an snatch mission. There was a whisper of a rumor that Harry Potter was living as Harriet Pomfrey. She was the spitting image of James Potter with Lily's eyes. That such a resemblance would occur naturally was not impossible but certainly very improbable. The Death Eaters were to grab the Pomfrey girl and if possible the Granger girl. Both witches were very talented. They would be assets to the Dark Lord or they would be dead. If the Pomfrey chit turned out to be Potter well, first revenge, then death. Amelia forwarded a copy of the report to Albus. No doubt the meddlesome old coot had an original already but in case he missed it she would remind him. She asked for a meeting with him. She needed the truth of the Potter matter.

Voldemort had spent much time and effort trying to ascertain the truth of the Potter matter. Potter lived that was certain. No one could confirm the birth of twins from Lily Potter. The Headmaster had been present. He was more than capable of keeping that kind of secret. The medi-witch who had overseen the birth had been subjected to some very hard questioning by his servants only weeks ago. Her mind hadn't been tampered with and she only remembered one child, a boy. Voldemort was almost certain that the Pomfrey girl was Potter, it was the only explanation. If only the eyewitness reports of her being female were not so consistent. If Potter was Pomfrey the charade should have ended his first night at Hogwarts when he tried to enter the girls dorms. The protection was old and powerful magic, not to be fooled.

Voldemort had sent a team to retrieve her. Five of his Death Eaters against two third year witches who had no warning they were in danger. His team was captured to a man and the targets were unharmed. They hadn't been his best but they had been more than enough to do the job. Always with Potter it was a matter of irritating setbacks. Enough! His next plan would succeed.

The Death Eater who had brought him the news from St. Moritz died in agony as payment for Voldemort's irritation. Voldemort ordered that he be supplied with copies of the Auror reports from St. Moritz. The Dark Lord ignored how his Death Eaters shrank against the walls avoiding his eyes following his execution of the messenger. He

had been careful to use the Death Eaters sparingly until this. Rio was under his thumb. Soon it would be time to exert more control.

Minerva McGonagall sat at her desk, staring into space. She had just come back from the holidays and was ready to investigate the attack on her daughter and Miss Granger by Snape.

She replayed the pensieve memories of the attack. Professor Snape had escalated the confrontation beyond all reasonable limits, of that there was no doubt. Why though? Why would he do such a thing? She rose and walked to her fireplace, grabbed a pinch of floo powder and called for the Headmaster. Although she was the Headmistress he would always be in her mind the Headmaster.

"Albus Dumbledore!"

A few minutes passed and the bearded face of Dumbledore appeared in flame.

"Minerva, how nice to speak to you, how may I be of help?"

"Can you step through please Albus? I am reviewing memories of Snape's attack on Miss Granger and Harriet."

She stumbled back, a bit surprised at how quickly Dumbledore had appeared.

"I have memories of the attack in that pensieve Albus, please review them and tell me what you think."

Albus dipped his finger into the memories and disappeared. A few minutes later he emerged into the office again. He did not look as cheery as he had when he stepped through the fire, he looked considerable more worried.

"Alastor and I have questioned Severus closely over the past few weeks. He has no memory of the attacks. He was unable to give any memory of the events to you Minerva?"

"That is correct."

"May we adjourn to the infirmary to see what wisdom Poppy had to share?"

Minerva nodded. They rose from their chairs, rode the spiral staircase down to the corridor and walked towards the infirmary

talking quietly. Luckily the students were in class and their walk was undisturbed.

"Poppy tested him and could find no medical reason for his behavior."

"No doubt, no doubt. I am interested in non medical reasons however. Are the Flamels available at this time?"

"They are in the castle yes. They are both in class. Do you require them?"

"Not as of yet. Please warn them that their help may be requested."

Minerva sent her tabby cat patronus to the Flamels with her message as they entered the infirmary.

"Poppy, Albus is here to help me in my investigation into the attack on Miss Granger and Harriet by Snape. Please tell him what you have told me."

"The girls were fine. Harriet was of course angry and Hermione of course curious. Severus had some internal damage to his brain, I was able to remove the pressure brought on by the bleeding and most likely he will be as able as he ever was. How has he recovered Albus?"

"He claims to remember nothing. His Dark Mark is very well defined, more so than any I have seen in recent years. It is so clear I wonder if Riddle had attained corporal form again. I checked the Marks on the other Death Eaters. They are still faint so I do not think he has a body of his own. I suspect he may have possessed Severus briefly. I have examined Snape's mind under Veritaserum while using legilimency on him, I can find no trace of memory or memory modification."

Minerva took up the tale, repeating what she had told him when he had collected Snape.

"Once he was disarmed and petrified he tried to mind rape first Hermione and then Harry. Hermione blocked his attempt, Harry did rather more, quite a bit more, resulting in Snape losing consciousness."

The Headmistress drew a breath.

"Do you think it possible that Riddle is, or was, present in the castle Albus?"

Minerva sounded sick and worried, her face pale and vaguely gray. Poppy swallowed convulsively, staring at the Headmaster.

"It would appear that he has been. It is most difficult to say if he is still present. This is most unfortunate. What do the wards tell you Minerva?"

"The wards? How could I be so stupid!"

She whirled and rushed from the room.

Albus caught Minerva at the entrance to the Headmistress's chambers. She glanced at him, her mouth tight with worry and self recrimination. They hurried into the Headmasters office, then into a room accessible only by the current Head. The ward room was one of the crowning achievements of magic, developed by the four founders and improved by each successive Head. Some of the rune sets had passed from knowledge since it was built. The protections begun in that room had grown for a thousand years, becoming strong beyond imagining.

Every Head of Hogwarts had tried to improve the wards, it was a basic duty, and one taken most seriously. The wards drew from the excess magic of the students and faculty, all the spells gave a bit of magic to the wards. Neither Albus nor Minerva could imagine a force capable of taking those wards down. Perhaps every magical being in Britannia working together over a period of days could destroy the wards, nothing else would.

The mind of Hogwarts was something that the Heads could reach from this room. Harriet seemed to be able to access the soul of the castle, possibly in the same way she could create sabers, change genders, and "upgrade the firmware" as she insisted on calling her ability to enhance reflexes and senses.

Minerva laid her hands on a massive spherical piece of quartz that recorded all the activities concerning the wards. She began to scroll

back in time looking for an anomaly, moving backwards just slightly faster than real time through the day of the attack. Albus put a hand on her shoulder and joined her in her review. They played through the fight in the DADA classroom, wincing at the spike of power Harriet drove into Snape. He was lucky to be alive. They moved further back slowing the playback at the start of the "demonstration". They stood silent and still, watching for anything out of place. Finally, almost a day before the lesson they found an anomaly. Something very very dark had crossed the outer wards at dawn. No alert had been given. The Dark Lord had entered Hogwarts.

They withdrew from their trance and collapsed to the floor of the ward room. Minerva summoned Pepper Up and another, more potent, stimulant. They said nothing to one another, but conjured chairs and took their potions, forcing alertness on themselves. Again they submerged themselves in the logs of the wards. Scrolling forward from the fight in the DADA classroom they looked for any other sign of darkness affecting the wards. Nothing had entered the chamber they were in but themselves, the four houses were strongly warded although the ward on Slytherin was different than the others. They corrected the Slytherin ward to mirror the wards on the other houses. They were immediately deluged with alarms. Perenelle would be conducting a rather vigorous house cleaning it would seem. They checked all the other wards, looking for corrupted instructions as well now.

Both felt as if they had narrowly escaped a catastrophe. The ward instruction set had been altered to allow what amounted to a tunnel through the wards for Dark objects. The castle was essentially blind to Dark Objects including lower level life forms. It seemed obvious in retrospect, how had the wards not detected a basilisk? They corrected the corrupted instructions and hoped that another deluge of information didn't wash over them. But Quirrell hadn't been a lower form, neither had Ginevra Weasley. How had they missed Quirrell with Voldemort possessing him? How had the wards missed the essence of the Dark Lord twice in as many years? Had the wards done so again in just the past few days?

They tested their fears and proved them correct. The Dark Lord could enter Hogwarts in spirit form without trouble. They started at the ward room and worked outwards, removing the exception the Dark Lord had managed to incorporate into the scheme. Headmaster Dippet must have suffered an Imperio during his last

days. The wards sealed firmly. The concentration of alarms in the Slytherin house area they would deal with. The wards ejected a spirit, so dark that it could only be the Riddle, leaving behind the husk of a rodent. He had been in the area of the seventh floor corridor that contained an area of ambiguity, much like the blind spot that had existed before the Chamber of Secrets became Salazar's Spa. Minerva made a mental note to include this other area in the ward scheme. There was a further presence in the ambiguity on the seventh floor. Neither could quite make out what it was, object or living being, it seemed like both and very Dark.

Satisfied that the school was safe for the present they pulled back into themselves. They had been almost four days in objective time examining the wards. Minerva helped Albus from the ward room, into the Heads office. He collapsed onto a couch. McGonagall managed to make her way to her bedchamber before collapsing. Fawkes flamed in and took up watch. Poppy quickly followed as the security lockdown on the Heads office relaxed.

Poppy fell into her routine, burying her worry. She ran diagnostic spells on the two of them. They were dehydrated, exhausted and asleep. She began to rehydrate them, and make them more comfortable. The answers could wait, they needed their rest, it looked like they had used stimulants a short time ago so she didn't want to administer any more, they needed real rest.

She called Moody, and then went in search of Harry who had been frantic. Moody flooded into the heads office and stood guard over them as they slept. He wasn't sure what had happened, just that his best friend needed him, Alastor didn't need to know right now. All too often Moody had waited for news only to have it be bad, this was a gladsome thing. He took a pull from his hip flask and watched the floor and the door, ready to repel boarders.

Harry was working over a set of drawings in the Gryffindor common room when Poppy found her. Her eyes were tight and her hand shook a bit. She hadn't slept more than a few hours in days, since her Auntie had gone missing and the Head's office had gone on security lockdown. Harry looked up as Poppy entered the room. Harry froze and stared at her aunt, her mother. Poppy smiled, eyes glistened a bit. Harry shot across the room and grabbed Poppy in a massive teary eyed hug. They swayed together while Poppy held her daughter and stroked the soft raven disaster of her hair.

"She is fine, Albus is with her, she is tired, hungry and asleep. Mr. Moody and Fawkes are watching over them. She is safe."

Harry held back a sob, nodding into her Aunts shoulder. She had become as tall as Poppy recently, though a bit shorter still than Minerva. Hermione moved to encircle them both in her strong arms. The common room had fallen still when Poppy entered, but erupted into the noise of one telling another that the Headmistress was going to be alright. Poppy made it official with an announcement to the house, then went in search of Filius to inform him that he was acting Head until she declared Minerva fit for duty again. Poppy hurried, if Minerva woke up first Poppy would never get her to rest.

Harry returned to her chair and sat back in relief, Auntie Minerva was safe.

Well that is one less worry. Snape though. I hope the git recovers. Never should have hit him that hard. Harry felt both angry at Snape for his actions and terribly guilty about her actions. He had been down and helpless when she had struck back at him. She tried to refocus on the drawings before her.

She was working over plans for a magically powered high speed vehicle. Muggle racing autos were able to far exceed the speed of the best broom not to mention technology like the beautiful SR-71 Blackbird. Harry loved any kind of speed; skis, brooms, trains, cars. She had created a light saber when those don't exist and was trying to distract herself with plans for another thing that didn't exist.

Broom companies were understandably reluctant to allow the actual charms and runes that earned them their livelihood to become general knowledge. The general catagories of charms they used were fairly evident. Hermione had helped her locate some books on the subject, most of the work was far beyond third year, at least for control spells. Harry just wanted to see how fast magic could make something move.

Hermione's arms wrapped around her Harry from behind.

"It's alright Harry."

Harry grabbed Hermione's hands with her own and leaned back into her love.

"No. It isn't. I made his brain bleed."

Harry was quivering, just a bit, the high speed shimmy of nerves on the edge of breaking.

"How many times do you have to learn this Harry? What does Sir say? Don't leave them moving. Snape tried to mind rape both of us."

"I struck back at him, he was helpless and I made his brain bleed."

"Yes you did. Did you intend to kill him?"

"No, of course not, I was angry and wanted to make sure he didn't do it again. I wanted to punish him for trying to hurt you and for all his other shite. I guess I just let it all come up and gave it back to him."

Hermione pulled a hand loose and stroked Harry's mess of hair.

"Snape is an evil and vindictive man. He is petty and vicious. You lost control for a second. He is alive. Do you think we can do this without mistakes Harry? Harry we fight. We have been training to fight for years now. You need to talk to Sir about this. If you can't talk to him talk to the Headmaster or Moody. We have to be ready to kill. When we get to Riddle we kill him. If we have to kill to get to him we kill. Snape was acting way out of character, you know that. I imagine that when we are able to talk to the Headmistress we will learn why."

Harry started to cry, not Hollywood pretty crying, but full, deep, angry, sorrowful sobs. She hid in Hermione's embrace, making a horrid mess of Mione's blouse. Hermione held her and glared at all that stared or dared to even begin to snicker. Ron and Neville moved to guard them along with Ginny and the twins, screening them from the others. Harry slowly relaxed and accepted a tissue then cast a cleaning charm on Hermione's clothes.

"Thanks love. I wouldn't be able to do this without you."

Harriet's voice was so soft, barely stirring the hairs at the nape of Hermione's neck. Mione nodded, gave another strong squeeze and pulled back a bit, holding Harry's hands.

"What are you working on so hard dear?"

"I am trying to make a high speed vehicle powered by magic."

Harriet could feel the hook set. Hermione angled for a view of the drawings, she hummed a bit.

"How interesting. May I join you in your need for speed?"

The others leaned in to look over the sketches, but were quickly driven off by the arithmancy and runes. The girls had a test vehicle designed by the time Minerva woke up almost a full day later.

The Headmistress was awake for less than an hour when she accompanied Perenelle into the Slytherin common room floating a large box. Centuries worth of hidden dark experiments, cursed objects of all sorts, potions and poisons were confiscated and destroyed. The other houses were searched as well, and cleaned. The Flamels restored the wards to keep the boys from the girls rooms. Millie seemed very happy with the search and seizure, as well as the new security for the girls rooms.

Two weeks after the holiday break Harriet and Hermione finished engraving runes on a long slender piece of wood. They placed tracking charms and a few other sensor type charms on their test vehicle; temperature, distance and relative angle to the starting point. Over and over they engraved the rune scheme Professor Babbling had confirmed would give them axial thrust. Inset in the wood were crystals that would accept charges from their pajamas. Mounted on the front of the wood was a single purpose magical eye. Stubby fins near both the front and rear of the ugly thing would provide guidance. Harriet and Hermione had rigged a throttle and a joystick and slaved the optical output of the magical eye to a replica of a Rebellion flight helmet complete with phoenix on the side. They had a lot of fun figuring out how to feed the sensor data to a heads up display in the helmet, but with the help of Professor Babbling and Professor Flitwick they solved the instrumentation problem.

The girls moved to the Quidditch pitch carrying their magical rocket on a Monday evening three weeks after the Holiday break. They balanced it on its fins, pointed straight up and stood back. Harry wore the helmet, they sat in the stands well away from the rather large amount of magical energy stored in their experiment.

"Ready Moine?"

"Shouldn't we say something ridiculously nerdy right now?"

"Yes, it is required in the Mad Scientist Handbook. You did read your copy yes?"

"Actually, no. If you recall it's Hogwarts, A History that I read."

"um.. Well here goes nothing."

Harriet moved the thrust controller to the half way point. They heard a sharp crack and their toy disappeared. Harriet started laughing and opened the throttle all the way for a second, then quite quickly brought it back to the half way position.

"Started to overheat. The eye isn't so good now, I think I melted it a bit."

Harriet pulled back gently on the joystick and looped the test vehicle back towards them.

"Fastest was a lit bit over Mach 2. I'm trying to land it now. Can you send up a light Mione?"

Hermione cast "Lumos Solarus". The pitch was brilliantly illuminated.

"Nope still to high, I can see the curve of the earth, need to get lower."

A few seconds pass, Harry pulled back further on the throttle.
"Again?"

Brilliant light washed again over the stands and field. "Got it Harry?"

"Yeah, there it is, hold that Mione."

Harriet bumped the throttle up and then closed it. Far off they heard a crack, then a second crack shortly after much nearer and sharper. Harriet bumped the throttle watching carefully while pulling sharply back on the stick. She closed the throttle again. Hermione could see the finned broom dropping to the ground, gaining speed. The impact drove the piece of wood into the frozen ground a good few inches, breaking off the fins.

The two mad scientists raced over to their creation. It was charred, the eye in the front partly melted, the stubby fins scorched. The magical reserves were nearly full and the wood of the shaft nearly shattered.

Both were elated with the results of their test run. They needed brakes, they needed landing gear and they needed some form of shielding against heat.

"We need repulsors on the bottom. Landing skids. Retrorockets for braking."

Hermione laughed.

"No we just need to change the axis of thrust so we can direct a bit forward and a bit down."

Harry tucked her helmet and controller into her rucksack, shouldered their charred test sled, and took Hermione's hand. They headed back to the castle. There was some fine fussing to do in pursuit of speed. Mione could talk about changing the sign of the arithmancy equations as much as she wanted, they were still repulsors.

THE DAILY PROPHET

POTTER RUMORS CENTER ON POMFREY

by Rita Skeeter

For years it has been known that Harry Potter is still alive. Despite an exhaustive ongoing investigation by this reporter the exact location and condition of The Boy Who Lived remain shrouded in secrecy and rumor. Albus Dumbledore has confirmed that he was the last wizard to see little Harry Potter. Dumbledore refuses all attempts by this reporter to enlist his aid in uncovering the true story

of young Harry's fate. Dumbledore had only a short comment concerned the safety of young Mr. Potter.

"I have no doubt that forces loyal to He Who Must Not Be Named would very much like to know the whereabouts of Mr. Potter. I would be remiss indeed in my duty to protect Mr. Potter if I were to discuss his whereabouts with the news media. Please know that he is as safe as he can be made."

Rumors have existed for years centering on Harry's distant relative Miss Harriet Pomfrey, the adopted daughter of medi-witch Poppy Pomfrey and Headmistress Minerva McGonagall. Many of the people who knew James Potter remark that Miss Pomfrey bears a striking resemblance to James. Those who knew Lily Potter nee Evans remark that Miss Pomfrey's eyes are remarkably like Mrs. Potters. It is possible that Miss Pomfrey is exactly as we have been told, the powerfully magical daughter of distant colonial squib relatives of the Potters, bearing an uncanny resemblance to James and Lily.

But is it likely?

I have been unable to obtain any information concerning the natural parentage of Miss Pomfrey. I was able to obtain a glimpse of records purported to be true copies of the medical history of Miss Pomfrey. Those records were ambiguous, listing Madam Pomfrey and Headmistress McGonagall as parents by adoption. Of interest is the location of the adoption, a small village in New Guinea. Correspondence with the village elders has proven difficult. It appears they eat the post owls. This reporter wonders why a child from the colonies was taken to a very distant part of the world for an adoption the natural parents supported.

After hours of careful questioning and at considerable expense I have been able to unearth another rumor concerning the birth of The Boy Who Lived. Mr. Mundungus Fletcher confided to me that he had heard a rumor Mrs. Potter gave birth to twins. Does the Boy Who Lived have a twin sister, taken from the Potters and raised by Madam Pomfrey and Headmistress McGonagall?

I was able to interview now retired medi-witch Mrs. Agatha Cristie of Hercule House, Ipswich. It was Mrs. Cristie who attended Mrs. Potter during her delivery. Mrs. Cristie was positive that the only

child was a boy who was named Harry James Potter. Mrs. Cristie refused both veritiserum and interrogation by a Legilimens claiming that her word was her bond. It may be she is covering up the birth of twins, or that her memory has been modified.

Little can be said with certainty concerning our beloved hero. Harriet Pomfrey looks remarkably like the child of James and Lily Potter. She has a lightning bolt scar on her forehead, exactly as Harry Potter did. Miss Pomfrey shares a birthday with young Harry.

Without further investigation by the Ministry we may never know with certainty the truth of Miss Harriet Pomfrey and Mr. Harry Potter.

You, my faithful readers, are left to judge the likelihood of a nearly miraculous similarity between distant relatives including a scar and a birthday.

You, my faithful readers, must judge the chance of an extremely well hidden twin who just happens to have the same scar as Harry.

A conclusion that Harriet and Harry are the same person seems likely until one questions Miss Pomfrey's classmates. Miss Pomfrey is able to enter the girls dormitory in Gryffindor house, something no male can do.

Headmistress Minerva McGonagall refused this reporter access to her adopted daughter Miss Pomfrey.

Laudable as this careful stewardship of Miss Pomfrey is, it should be noted that such stewardship only seems to apply to the press.

While there is no doubt that academic standards have risen at Hogwarts over the past two years there also seems to be little doubt that acceptable standards of behavior have fallen.

Recently Miss Pomfrey and Miss Hermione Granger engaged their Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor, Professor Severus Snape, in an unsanctioned duel resulting in his prolonged hospitalization.

Recently Headmistress McGonagall instituted a school wide search of students personal belongings resulted in the loss of many of those belongings to the staff. Recently Headmistress McGonagall

remained secluded in her quarters with former Headmaster Dumbledore for most of a week refusing all communication.

Miss Harriet Pomfrey's burgeoning romantic attachment to the brilliant muggleborn Miss Hermione Granger has been the scandal of the year at Hogwarts.

You, my faithful readers, must make clear that such unnaturalness, such blatant favoritism shown to deviants is not to be tolerated.

Perhaps it is time for a change in the leadership of our beloved Hogwarts.

In Rio the Dark Lord prepared the demonstration of his ascension as ruler of that city. His Death Eaters gathered around the massive landmark of Christ the Redeemer. He led them in a Dark ritual that enchanted the huge statue. The robe became black, the face wore a Death Eaters mask, the eyes glowed red, blood dripped from its mouth. The ritual complete his followers launched a massive Dark Mark into the predawn sky. Before the sun was an hour over the horizon the Brazilian Ministry had exhausted its Aurors trying to capture the statue and quell the growing disturbances in the city. The Dark Lord's forces drew the Aurors away when raiding parties apparated to crowded areas and killed whoever was unlucky enough to be present before apparating to the next target, repeating their bloody harvest.

The muggle government was paralyzed with indecision for the better part of a day. Finally an air strike was called in on the terrorists who had created the monstrosity.

The Dark Lords timing was exquisite. He had withdrawn the last of his forces even as the first of the air launched munitions slammed into the monument. The muggles were very effective in destroying one of the great symbols of faith in the world. His Death Eaters were equally effective on the streets of Rio, apparating into crowded areas, causing as much destruction and chaos as possible and leaving before a response could be mounted. His forces suffered very few losses, a few of the muggle military managed to use firearms against some of his more careless followers. The death toll was nearing the thousand mark and the city in flames when he ordered his Death Eaters to go to ground.

Aid from other Ministries in the ICW flooded into Rio, but the Dark Lord was well prepared. He had left the city with his followers and was safe in a hidden complex on the shores of the Caribbean sea. Behind him the wizarding world struggled to draw closed the gaping opening in the secrecy that shrouded it.

In Rome a meeting came to order. The pontiff was not pleased that his flock had been put to such a test and that an icon of faith had been the site of such blasphemy. Those present were mindful that many had suffered during the Inquisition, and most must have been innocent. With two thousand years of history the church knew how thin the veneer of civilization was. Rio could descend into madness perhaps pulling the rest of the continent after it. The pontiff directed that the church work alongside an old teacher and a one legged man. His Holiness was clear. Bring Riddle to judgment along with his followers. Tom Riddle would learn of a power he knew not, faith.

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